A Scholar of His College

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Alfred Crowquill —

S.C.H.

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BY

W. E. W. COLLINS

AUTHOR OF 'THE DON AND THE UNDERGRADUATE'

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TO

MY DEAR WIFE,

WITH MUCH LOVE.

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A SCHOLAR OF HIS COLLEGE.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE MOTE.

"Then you truly and seriously mean to go back from your definite promise to me, Leuchars?" and the speaker, a stout red-faced man of some sixty or more summers, scowled angrily as he looked at his companion.

Truth to say, the latter, for all his sweet temper and proverbial patience, was growing not a little weary of a discussion which seemed to promise only one possible ending, a quarrel between two lifelong friends, a quarrel which might last for a year or a month or a day—for so long, in fact, as Loder of Loders might choose to consider himself an aggrieved individual. For the man knew right well that, so far as his dealings with that most forbearing and longsuffering of mortals, Lord Leuchars, were concerned, the termination of a dispute about a matter of mere words and names lay practically at his own option. Wholly apart from a conviction, peculiar either to himself or to that character which thinks no evil of his fellow, a conviction that Dick Loder's faults, many and palpable,—faults of rough manners, still rougher tongue, overbearing temper, and unhappy tendency to mis-

construction of motives,—lay on the surface only, there were other circumstances which inhibited a man of his lordship's temperament from nursing a grievance against his neighbour Loder. He had shared to an unusual degree the feelings of love and respect which the whole neighbourhood had entertained for the late Mrs Loder, had argued to himself that so sweet a woman would never have bestowed her love upon a wholly unworthy object, and had never forgotten or regretted the promise made to her on the last occasion he had seen her, the promise that he would always do all that lay in his power for her two sons.

"Of course they will have their father, poor boys; but there," and she sighed, "you will do what you can for them, dear friend?"

"They shall be to me, so far as it is possible, as if they were my own boys. You may make your mind easy on that point. I only wish I could do more."

And there was one load the less on the uncomplaining woman's heart when she turned her face to the wall and died on that self-same night.

Right loyally the man kept his word, for the dead woman's sake, and for her sons' sake, extending a forbearance to the father, which that ungracious individual taxed to a full extent, —taxed perhaps all the more heavily because in his heart of hearts he knew it to be practically inexhaustible.

And yet, in justice to the man Loder be it said, there was not wanting evidence that, somewhat after the fashion of the pitman who is ready to accept as a personal defiance a kick levelled by a stranger at the dog which he himself habitually maltreats, he appreciated Lord Leuchars' good services to his family. For if on occasion he allowed himself the privilege of abusing that nobleman in private, a visitor at Loders who had stigmatised some action of his lordship as mean and illiberal was roughly warned that a man who made such remarks in his host's hearing would find his room more welcome than his company in that house.

"Truly and seriously, my dear Loder, to borrow your words," now said his lordship, "I never made any definite promise of the sort. It is a matter on which I should not have thought it right, even if it had been possible, to commit myself to what you are pleased to call a definite promise. You threw out a suggestion, and in a vague sort of way I took it up. And under certain circumstances,—but, good heavens! man, we need not go into the question of ifs and ands—there are far too many of them. As things have turned out, the thing is impracticable and wholly out of my power. I love the boys dearly—you know that yourself, and I promised your dear wife that I would do what I could for them, and if occasion offers I will do young Dick a good turn yet. But this thing that you ask me now I simply cannot do, or, if you prefer to put it in that way, I will not do, because—well, in short, because it is impossible."

"And pray why the devil should it be impossible, Leuchars? It is not a question of can't, it is won't. What in the name of all that is good or bad is to hinder you from putting in a warming-pan?"

"A warming-pan!" exclaimed Lord Leuchars.

"Yes, you know what I mean, a fellow to keep the place warm till Dick has taken his—what do you call the d—d thing?—his degree, isn't it? at Oxford, and then the boy could step in quite comfortably."

"Impossible, my dear Loder, absolutely impossible," said Lord Leuchars decisively. "In the first place, what you propose is, or ought to be, illegal; and in the second place, even if it were legal, which I don't think it is, mind you, it would be a most — well, what shall I call it? — a most arbitrary and improper proceeding on my part. No parson worth his salt would think of accepting a living under such conditions, and I really am not inclined to inflict an inferior article on our parishioners even for young Dick's benefit, nor——" and here he hesitated, and finally came to a full stop.

"Put in some old fossil," argued the other; "make him as good as you like—too good to last long. There are plenty of them about." Then, as Lord Leuchars shook his head, he continued in a louder and more angry tone, "Then you really mean to tell me, Leuchars, that after I have taken all the trouble and spent I don't know what on that young rascal's education, sending him to Oxford to waste his time and my money, just because I relied on your word, mark you, you intend to throw him overboard at the last minute and let him go to the devil his own way, simply and solely because you have got hold of some d—d silly, sentimental, idiotical, conscientious scruple."

When a man takes the trouble to employ some half-dozen adjectives, and furthermore to accentuate each one of them by thumping the table with his fist, he is clearly on the high-road to substitute invective for argument. It was perhaps unfortunate that Lord Leuchars did not then and there drop the discussion, leaving with the other the barren advantage of having had the last word, instead of trying to impart a new tone to the conversation by the introduction of a harmless joke.

"Come, come, my dear fellow," he expostulated, "it's not quite so bad as all that. A good education is never entirely thrown away, and we will hope that my friend Dick will not waste either his time or money at Oxford. He could not have wasted his time at school or he would never have got that scholarship. No, no, the lad is a good lad and a clever lad, a gentleman every inch of him, and a downright steady and safe shot. But after all, my dear Loder, as you admit, there is not much of the parson about him as yet. Capital good fellow and all that, with plenty of pluck and nerve, but upon my honour, if one comes to think of it, he has less of the parson about him at present than of the gamekeeper."

"The what?" roared Dick Loder; "did you say gamekeeper?"

"Well, yes, I did."

"You dare to call my son a gamekeeper! Then I tell you

to your face, Leuchars, and I shouldn't care who was here to hear it, that you are an infernal humbug and impostor. You talk one minute of what you will do for the boy, you even dare to drag my dead wife's name into the conversation, and then in one and the same breath you call her son and my son a gamekeeper! That is your friendship, is it! That is the way you keep your promises!" and in another minute, disregarding a few feeble protestations made by his host, the angry Squire fairly shouted himself out of the room.

"God bless my heart and soul!" exclaimed Lord Leuchars when he found himself alone, "why in the world should a man go off at a tangent like that? I never called the lad a gamekeeper, did I? And if I did, I never meant to. Let me see, what were the words that I used? Ah—of course that's it. I said there was more of the gamekeeper about him than of the parson, and so there is. And so again there is in young Bertie or in any other lad of that age. But I wish Loder had not gone off like that."

And Lord Leuchars, not a little disturbed in mind, went on for some minutes thus soliloquising and arguing with himself, until a soft laugh warned him that another person had quietly entered the room. Conscious of the fact that he had been thinking aloud, he started for the moment; but as he encountered the smiling gaze of a tall and striking-looking girl who was leisurely pulling off her gloves and making other preparations for a lengthy stay, he gave vent to a sigh of relief and composedly observed—

"Oh, it's only you, Betty, is it?"

"Only myself, sir. Aren't you glad? It might have been Grimes or one of the footmen, or it might have been mother, but it is only your Betty. But," she added, as, having struggled out of her jacket, she hung it on a chair and then turned round and faced her father, "now look me in the face and tell me whether you think it a kind or a father-like or a respectful way to speak of your one devoted child as 'only you'?"

The relative beauty of women is a matter of opinion rather than of downright certainty, so that it would be over-venturesome to indorse the verdict given by more than one of Lady Betty Lisle's numerous admirers, that the face which Lord Leuchars was now invited to study was far and away the prettiest among the many pretty faces in the county of Westhamptonshire. But he who once cast his eyes upon the young lady's face and failed to avail himself of the opportunity of studying it with attention must needs have been a wholly insensate or purblind mortal. The painter in search of a perfect type of beauty might allow himself the liberty of criticising one or other of the features—might say, for instance, that when the face was in repose there was a look of softness about the lines of the mouth; but the dark liquid eyes, the exquisitely chiselled nose and chin, and the bright sunny smile that, as now, from time to time lighted up the whole face, were points that could not fail to commend themselves to the most critical observer. Just at the moment as she stood there with her fair complexion flushed by exercise Lady Betty was looking at her very best, as a healthy young woman who has been indulging in a long constitutional on a winter's day has every right to look, and this fact apparently commended itself to her father, who for a minute or more allowed his gaze to linger on her face without volunteering any remark.

"Well, my dear father," remarked the girl at last, "I hope you have quite satisfied yourself as to my identity. There are not very many other girls likely to be in the house, or at any rate in your sanctum, at this hour of the day, are there? And now may I ask why you are here talking to yourself, and what you have been quarrelling with Mr Loder about?"

"Quarrelling with Loder!" exclaimed Lord Leuchars, rather aghast at having this direct accusation levelled against him. "How do you know that I have been quarrelling with Loder?"

"How do I know it?" was the ready retort; "how does

one know anything except by putting two and two together and then guessing, or jumping to a conclusion—that's the proper term, isn't it? Well, when I meet Mr Loder walking to the stables with his shoulders hunched up to his ears, and when he only condescends to favour me with an inarticulate growl as I speak to him, I rather naturally conclude that he is not in a very amiable temper. Then I come into your room to find you so busy talking to yourself that you never know I am here, and so I put these two things together and guess that you and he have not found each other's company very agreeable. Now, sir, confess to your daughter: am I not right?"

"Well, in a way, yes, you little witch," and Lord Leuchars made the admission rather reluctantly; "there has been a little misunderstanding certainly, not a quarrel exactly,—it takes——"

"Two people to make a quarrel," struck in Betty, taking the words out of his mouth, "and only one to make a misunderstanding; and, judging from Mr Loder's manner, I even seem to see who the one was. I really have no patience with him," she continued viciously; "and you, dear, have so much, too much almost. I cannot understand why such a wrong-headed—well, yes, and such a wicked old man," emphasising each epithet with a little stamp of her foot, "could have been allowed to marry so sweet a wife and to be the father of two such——" and here she hesitated for a word while her father watched her narrowly—"such respectable and nice sons."

"Both of them?" inquired Lord Leuchars with a rather malicious smile.

"Yes, both of them," stoutly affirmed Betty. "I like—now don't laugh at me, sir, I know what you mean quite well, but there, I do like them both, though of course I know Graham the better of the two."

"Bless my life and soul!" exclaimed Lord Leuchars with a sudden vehemence that fairly made Betty jump, "I had quite forgotten. I wonder if Graham has gone home—no, of course

he hasn't or you would have met him. He went into the drawing-room an hour ago when Loder came in here. The sooner we go and rescue him the better, young lady, or there may be another misunderstanding in that quarter: there is not much love lost between him and your mother, I'm afraid."

"And mother is so very easily—misunderstood," said Betty, making a comical little *moue*. "She is always so hard on Graham," she added rather sorrowfully, "and I am sure I don't quite know why she should be."

"Ah, well, no, perhaps not," and Lord Leuchars spoke a little dubiously; then seeing that Betty's face fell, he playfully took her hand, and tucking it under his arm, said in a cheery voice, "Come along, little daughter. We will go in and support each other as in the old days."

It was a reminiscence of Betty's nursery career, when every little peccadillo had been confessed in her father's ear, and he, having duly sealed his forgiveness with his lips, had undertaken to act as mediator with that rather rigid disciplinarian, Lady Leuchars.

So those two, arm in arm, threaded their way through the long passages that led to the drawing-room at quite the other end of the house.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THERE was something about the appearance of the couple whom Lord Leuchars and his daughter found sitting at tea in the drawing-room which might have suggested even to an uninitiated spectator that neither of them had found each other's companionship entirely congenial. And the uncontrollable look of relief which came over the young man's face as he ran to greet the new-comers at once enlisted the girl's sympathy on his behalf.

"Well, Graham," she said as they shook hands, "I hope that my mother has been doing the honours of the tea-table nicely."

"Oh yes, thank you. Lady Leuchars has been most—eh—kind."

"And conversational too, I hope? I wonder what you two have been talking about," and Betty proceeded to pour out tea for her father and herself. "There you are, my dear," as she handed him his tea; "two lumps of sugar and all,—sweets to the sweet, you know."

"Don't be ridiculous, Betty!" exclaimed Lady Leuchars, who intensely disliked the open love-making that went on between her husband and daughter. "I have just been telling Mr Loder," she continued in her rather high-pitched tones, "that I cannot understand how it is that in the present very

ominous state of foreign affairs our War Office should allow young men to be away from their regiments on these perpetual leaves."

"My dear mother!" exclaimed Betty, glancing merrily at her father as she spoke, "what a deliciously ingenuous way of telling a man that you wished he was somewhere else. I hope you appreciated the compliment, Graham; but I'm afraid you must have been boring my mother dreadfully: I only hope that she has not been boring you too. How very lucky that we two came in before they took to throwing the cups and saucers about, isn't it?" and she appealed to her father, who, having no remark ready, only muttered to himself something about Apollo and a bow. So Betty again took up the running on her own account.

"Is the state of foreign affairs more ominous than usual, mother?" she inquired.

"If you took the trouble to read the papers, Betty, you would know," was the majestic answer. "Really I am not going to take the trouble to instruct your ignorance."

"Ah, well! where ignorance is bliss, you know," sighed Betty. "Have some more tea-cake, Graham," helping herself as she spoke.

"You might at least have known," resumed Lady Leuchars, who as Ruling Dame of the local Primrose habitation rather enjoyed the occasional opportunities of displaying her oratorical powers on a platform, "that the Russian armies are gathering year after year nearer the Afghan frontier, that France has long been burning——"

"Oh, bother, just like the tea-cake," interrupted Betty. "Give me an underneath piece, please, Graham. Yes, mother, France has long been burning——"

But the invitation to continue the lecture passed unheeded. The thread of a political discourse once broken off is not easily picked up again, as more practised orators than Lady Leuchars have times galore found to their cost, so that her ladyship was well advised in now basing a

fresh attack upon her rather inconvenient daughter on hygienic grounds.

"How can you go on eating all that unwholesome tea-cake, Betty! You will completely spoil your appetite for dinner."

"Don't like mutton, do like tea-cake," responded Betty, so exactly mimicking the tones of a spoilt child that her father nearly choked in an unsuccessful attempt to conceal his amusement; "besides, mother dear, I am hungry now, and there is no knowing what I might be at eight o'clock."

"You certainly are not likely to have a healthy appetite then."

"Perhaps I shall have an unhealthy one," laughed Betty. "It seems to me that if healthy appetite means mutton, and unhealthy means tea-cake, I vastly prefer the latter, like the old gentleman in 'Pickwick.' You remember the story, Graham, don't you?"

Graham shook his head.

"No, what was it?" he asked; but Lady Leuchars effectually stopped the impending narration by turning her back on Betty and directly addressing the young man.

"I consider that the digestion, or I should say the abuse of the digestion, is the seat of all human maladies; don't you, Mr Loder?"

Lady Leuchars could not have devised a more expeditious method of getting rid of her visitor than by thus inviting his opinion. In the course of an unfortunately lengthy *tête-à-tête* with his hostess he had listened with much outward patience, though inward weariness, to a long diatribe on the shortcomings and general decadence of the young men of the present day, more particularly the young men in the army, and, most particularly of all, the young men in what Lady Leuchars had been at pains to describe as the ornamental and therefore wholly useless portion of the army, by which she meant to imply the Household Brigade as a body, and inferentially the young man, Graham Loder, as an individual member of that body. But however cordially he had welcomed the introduc-

tion of a less directly personal or less subjective form of discussion, he was by no means prepared to accept the conversational olive-branch thus abruptly held out to him, or to give his opinion on the digestive organs either of mankind in general or of any member of the present company.

"Upon my honour, Lady Leuchars," he said, rising from his chair as he spoke, "I don't know anything about it. I am very stupid about all those things. I—well, yes—I eat when I am hungry, and I hope I don't eat when I am not hungry, and I expect that most men do the same, and I do not trouble the doctor much, so that I hope my digestion is all right. But, do you know, I really must be saying good-bye. I have been here an unconscionable time already, but I was expecting my father every minute, and now I suppose that he has gone home without me. Has he gone home?" and he appealed to Lord Leuchars.

"Well, yes, I fancy that he has," answered Lord Leuchars, exchanging glances with Betty; "at least he went to the stables to get his horse, so that he must have gone home."

"Well, then, I had better follow him. Good night, Lady Leuchars. I am sure that you will be pleased to hear that I go back to duty to-morrow, and that they are not likely to give me any more leave for a long time to come. Good night, Betty. Oh," to Lord Leuchars, who was manifesting an intention of accompanying his guest out of the room, "don't you bother to come. I can find my way all right."

"I want to come that way, if you don't mind," said Lord Leuchars briefly, and then as soon as they were outside the room he went on, "The fact of the matter is, Graham, that your father went off in a hurry because he was not very much pleased with something I said to him."

"Went off in a huff as well as in a hurry, eh?" said Graham, smiling; "well, I am afraid that I have known him do that before."

"So have I, but—hem—well, Graham, I am afraid this is rather more serious than usual. I know that you have plenty

of common-sense, my boy, and so I don't mind telling you that your father made a very impossible proposition to me, and I had to refuse to accept it, and then he worked himself up into a temper, and when I rather foolishly tried to laugh it off with some harmless joke about young Dick, he took offence, and—well, in fact, he went away in a rage."

"About Dick?" exclaimed Graham. "Well, that is bad. Not that it mightn't have been worse—it might have been about——" However, he had just checked himself in time, and had managed to suppress the word "money," which was in his thoughts and almost on his lips. "He is not generally so touchy about Dick. But do you want me to do anything, Lord Leuchars? I am afraid that I should make a very indifferent ambassador, but I will do my best."

"I know you will, my boy, in that and anything else," answered Lord Leuchars warmly; "and by the way, Graham, don't you go and lay too much stress on anything my lady says: she is a bit of a martinet about the duties of young men—yes, and of young women too," and he smiled as the recollection of certain passages of arms between his wife and his self-willed daughter occurred to his memory. "Just you remember that you have two very staunch friends in this house who are always glad to see you—or your brother. But now about this matter," and he shortly put the young man in possession of the circumstances that had led to his father's violent outbreak.

"Of course you couldn't say or do anything else," said Graham at the conclusion of the narrative, "and of course the grievance about the gamekeeper was only a convenient peg to hang a hat upon, but I am very sorry that it has fallen out this way all the same. The chances are that my father will have gone home and fallen foul of Dick, and then there will be ructions. It's an odd thing, you know, that, though there is no doubt that my father cares more for Dick's little finger than he does about my whole body, you or anybody else might have called me a horse-coper

and he would not have minded: all the same, he is awfully down on the boy at times."

"A queer way of showing of affection," interposed Lord Leuchars, thinking of his own relations with Betty.

"Oh, that is right enough, but it is his way all the same. I am not worth powder and shot, I suppose, and Dick is. Anyhow, he is often falling foul of Dick, and Dick does not manage him very well on those occasions. He is a clever young beggar, as you know, and when he thinks, or perhaps knows, that he is in the right, he tries to argue with my father, and that is fatal. I think I learnt wisdom in that direction by seeing how perfectly my poor mother always managed him, and of course Dick, poor boy, was too young to understand it, and besides I never had brains enough to argue. Dick has monopolised the brains that were meant for the pair of us. But there, it is no good talking—the sooner I get home under the circumstances the better. Good night and good-bye, and thank you, Lord Leuchars."

"Good night, Graham, my boy, and God bless you!" said Lord Leuchars, warmly pressing the young man's hand. "I think you will carry through your life a good deal that you did learn from your dear mother, and that is something better than mere cleverness. You will do your best with your father, I know," and so they parted.

CHAPTER III.

RETROSPECTION.

As Lord Leuchars slowly retraced his steps to the drawing-room his heart felt very soft towards the young man from whom he had just parted. He was a busy man himself, as chairman of the County Council and sundry local committees; often absent from home in that period of the year when he was nominally resident at his country seat, and an indefatigable attendant in the House of Lords during the parliamentary session. And as Graham Loder was quartered at Windsor, and seldom found the time or the inclination to spend more than a casual day in London, there was nothing wonderful in the fact that the two had only met at rare intervals during the past few years.

"Just like he was as a boy—not spoilt in any way whatever;" and having uttered this conclusion half aloud, Lord Leuchars nodded his head approvingly, for several things in their late conversation had appealed to his lordship very strongly. Apart from the young man's evident conviction that he was no favourite with his father, that it was on Jacob rather than on Esau that with all goodwill the Squire's blessing—however a dubious form it might take—would assuredly descend, there was complete absence of any trace of resentment against the father or jealousy of the more favoured brother; and even the naïve confession of the latter's superior intellectual powers had

been made with the air of a man who speaks of a thing that is self-evident to his hearer as well as to himself.

That Graham Loder had, after one failure, only won his way into Sandhurst by downright hard work and rigid self-denial, while, on the contrary, Dick, who was at Marlborough, had without undue exertion fairly swept the board of the school prizes, were facts well within Lord Leuchars' knowledge. And he was furthermore aware that it was only owing to the elder brother's calm insistence on the carrying out of the late Mrs Loder's wishes that the younger boy had been kept at school instead of being allowed to run wild at home, a willing victim to his father's caprices.

"The place is dull without the boy," argued the Squire; "I like to hear the sound of his voice about."

"You hear plenty of that in the holidays, sir," was the quiet answer. "If Dick was never to be under any discipline at all, he would soon become an intolerable nuisance. He is made for better things than to be perpetually loafing about with gamekeepers and stable-boys."

"And what the devil is the good of all this book-learning, I should like to know? I looked into one of his prizes the other day and could not make head or tail of any two words."

"If you will ask Lord Leuchars, sir, he will tell you that a good education is never thrown away."

"D—n Leuchars!" growled the Squire. And yet after due reflection he did one morning broach the subject to his lordship.

"I don't quite grasp the object of this infernal conspiracy between Graham and yourself to keep young Dick's nose to the grindstone, Leuchars. Perhaps you can tell me what the devil good is likely to come of it. I tried to get it out of Graham, but he—well, Graham is an ass."

"Hey, hey, what are you talking about, man? You leave Graham alone—he is as sound and as right-minded a lad as I ever met. But conspiracy, nose to the grindstone, eh? Do you mean the boy's education? You would not like a sharp

boy like that to grow up without knowing anything except what he learns from——" and he hesitated—"well, from my gamekeeper, we'll say."

The Squire made no direct reply to this remark. His views as to the form of education suitable to a boy in these days of competition might possibly have been interesting, but his present *rôle* was to grumble rather than to argue.

"All I know is that this d—d schooling costs a pretty penny," he grumbled. "More than £500 I have paid for the young rascal already, and there seems to be no end to it."

Lord Leuchars laughed drily, as having strong private grounds for doubting the accuracy of this statement, but thought it prudent to forego any discussion as to the source from which the ways and means for Dick's education were being provided.

"And a very good investment of money too, my dear Loder. With those talents and a good education the boy may be anything he chooses to be some day. Who knows that he won't wake up some morning to find himself Lord Chancellor or Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"I know it, and so do you," was the retort. "He is much more likely to find himself in Hanwell, or some such infernal place."

"Well, well, not quite at the top of the tree, perhaps;" and after making this concession Lord Leuchars went on in his cheery way—"but, at any rate, he will be quite able to earn a very good livelihood as a barrister or as a parson. Why, my dear fellow, there is no reason why he should not become rector of Barnwick here: it's in my gift, you know—£800 a-year and a good house, if things work out right."

And this good-natured, though rather rash and premature, suggestion made some four years ago, the Squire, though nothing more had been said at the time, had construed and registered in his own mind as a definite promise. It was curious how rigidly he had kept his own counsel in the matter, never

making, even to Lord Leuchars, any allusion to their conversation; but he had brooded over the idea by day and by night, and the longer and the more frequently he thought about it, the more strongly it seemed to commend itself to his obstinate and unreasonable nature. It was a very simple and convenient solution of sundry existing and daily increasing difficulties. The ant, as the Latin grammar tells us, "provida futuri," collects a heap of corn. The Squire "providus futuri" —that is, impregnated with the conviction that, come what might, the favourite son's future might be regarded as provided for—put off to a more convenient day the unpleasant process of curtailing his personal expenditure and reducing to moderate bounds the general extravagance of the establishment at Loders.

"There is young Dick provided for," he said over and over again to himself, though he invited no one, not even the boy himself, to share his confidence; "£800 a-year and a house, and the run of old Leuchars' shooting—he'll have enough, d—n it all, to keep a couple of nags and have his three days a-week with the hounds. And then there's Graham with his mother's money, and he is a careful sort of a fellow; and there will be some odd pickings for him yet out of the old place—so I'll just have another little bit more out of old Porter: it's a poor heart that knows no rejoicings."

And with that he would order his cob and ride off to Westhampton, and make a little arrangement with the ever civil and obliging firm of Porter & Porter, who practically managed the estate, and always seemed to have ready to hand a client prepared to advance a little money on mortgage at what the senior partner was pleased to call "a very fair rate of interest considering the hard times, you know, Mr Loder, and the uncertainty of land tenure."

How deeply involved the estate was no one except the aforesaid senior partner of the Porter firm exactly knew; and as the few odd thousands that he was now and again called upon to supply were always forthcoming, and to a

certain extent at all events were utilised in keeping up appearances, there was no reason why the secret should become public property. Three people, however, had their own shrewd suspicions that money matters at Loder were not quite so rosy as they looked on the surface, and those three were Lord Leuchars, Graham Loder, and, indirectly and in a minor degree, Lady Leuchars, whom popular report credited with the power of being able to see into a millstone, at least as far as any of her neighbours. Lord Leuchars, though by no means troubled with that, of all complaints the most unsatisfying, inquisitiveness, had, *nolens volens*, been dragged a little behind the scenes. As trustee to the late Mrs Loder, whose private fortune of some £1500 a-year had, by a curious but, as things had turned out, an altogether providential arrangement, been settled in its entirety upon the eldest son, his lordship had found that the office was no sinecure, having on more than one occasion during Graham's minority been compelled to turn a deaf ear to Mr Loder's suggestions that the principal sum, which the nature of the trust allowed to be invested in mortgage on freehold estate, might as well be thus invested in a mortgage on the Loder property as elsewhere.

During his wife's lifetime the interest had by her especial request been paid to the Squire's account, and it came to him rather in the light of a revelation after her demise that the money was under Lord Leuchars' control rather than his own. For, the other trustee having predeceased Mrs Loder, and there being nothing in the wording of the trust to necessitate the appointment of a successor, Lord Leuchars, rather against his own better judgment, had yielded to the strongly expressed wishes of the lady herself, and had consented to act alone, for a time at all events, rather than to allow the last few months of her rapidly waning life to be disturbed by legal formalities. The result of this omission to appoint a co-trustee was that on her death he found himself practically occupying the position of guardian to her elder son. After due deliberation he came to the conclusion that it would be

only right to consult the lad, who, in virtue of his sixteen years, might be supposed to be capable of grasping some ideas as to the value of money, on the matter of the immediate disposal of the yearly income. Hitherto the guardian had only thought of his ward as of a quiet and rather shy boy absolutely devoted to his mother, and reported of by the Eton authorities as steady and diligent, but anything rather than brilliant. Now he was not a little impressed as well by the sound and sensible views which Graham took of the situation as by the generous instincts which the lad betrayed.

"And how much of it has gone into my father's pock—I mean the housekeeping?" inquired the boy.

"All—no, I don't quite mean that," said Lord Leuchars, hastily correcting himself. "Your education has, we will say, been paid out of it, and your dear mother's personal expenses —dress and so forth, and of course her maid; all these things mount up, so we will say that half of it, say £750"—his lordship thought it as well to suppress the fact that the income which he had put roughly at £1500 was as a matter of fact a little over £1600—"yes, £750, we may call it, was under your father's control."

"Then I should like it to go on just as before, only that Dick must be educated too."

"Your father ought to pay for Dick's education."

"But will he?" said the boy. "I should not like Dick not to have as good an education as myself. I am sure that he is clever. Now I am very thick—stupid, I mean; in fact, my father always says that I am the most dunderheaded idiot in creation, and I often think that he is right. But I really do try, Lord Leuchars."

"I'm sure of that, my boy, but——" here Lord Leuchars came to a full stop, and then after a momentary hesitation restarted the sentence. "Look here, Graham, I take it that one way or another your school bills with your tailoring and all that sort of thing may run to some £350 a-year."

"Then if you add another £350 for Dick, my father might have £800 for the whole expenses."

"Hulloa, my dear fellow, I thought you were stupid," exclaimed Lord Leuchars. "I can see one thing about you, my boy, you are—well, no matter, something that will pass muster where cleverness goes to the wall. But now, I don't think we shall want quite as much as £350 for Dick. There is no necessity for sending him to Eton."

"Why not? it's the best school in the world,"—and the boy spoke with more animation than he had shown before. Lord Leuchars smiled approvingly.

"Quite right to stick up for your own school, my boy. I was at Harrow myself, and I thought that the best, but we shall not quarrel over that. Eton is the best place for you, no doubt, so there! But you see Dick is not in quite the same position as yourself. He will have to make his own way in the world, and I don't think that an Eton education is perhaps quite the best training for that. If I am to have any voice in the matter—I don't say that I shall, mind—I shall recommend that in course of time he goes to Rugby or Marlborough or some other good school, where he will really have quite as good an education as you are having, though it won't cost quite as much."

The boy's face fell.

"I should have liked Dick to have gone to Eton," he murmured, speaking rather to himself than to Lord Leuchars. "Of course, you know best," he said aloud, after a minute's pause, "and you have been very kind. But," and his face brightened up, "please, Lord Leuchars, if Dick's schooling is not to cost as much as mine, could you put the difference between my £350 and what Dick's school costs apart from the rest of the money, so that Dick could have it later on, when he grows up, you know? or do you think that would be unfair to my father?"

It would be difficult to analyse Lord Leuchars' feelings as he listened to this request. The boy's eagerness on his

brother's account, and the natural and matter-of-fact sort of way in which he had assumed that what was his by right must be equally shared with the younger brother, appealed very strongly to the good-natured nobleman. And then he was almost equally struck by the delicate consideration shown for the feelings of a parent who had displayed so marked an incapacity to recognise the finer touches in his son's character, coupled with a brutal readiness to condemn the boy's involuntary shortcomings.

"If that is your stupidity, my boy," he exclaimed with some warmth, "God help the clever men, I say." Then as he saw that Graham was evidently more startled than gratified by this sudden outburst, he pulled himself together and proceeded calmly and gravely to review the situation.

"Look you here, Graham, my dear fellow, I do not want to pose as what they call in the House of Commons an obstructionist, but I must neither bind myself in the present nor hamper you in the future by making rash promises. Circumstances may be altered five years hence, or fresh circumstances may have arisen. We will see that the little fellow gets a good education—in fact, I will talk to your father about it the very first time that I get the chance. But for the present, at all events, we will let that matter of the few odd hundreds rest where it is, and when you come of age—well, then you can do what you like about it."

For the moment Graham looked disappointed. But his face brightened up again as he offered a new suggestion.

"Well, of course you know best," he admitted, "but promises! Please, Lord Leuchars, do not let Dick know anything about this, and then there would not have to be any promises, —that is, to any one but myself. He is a very little chap, you know, and of course he would not understand now if you did tell him. And then, you see, later on if he did understand, it might make things awkward between us."

"Quite right, my boy," answered Lord Leuchars. "You may depend upon it that I shall keep my own counsel about

it. Mum shall be the word, as the saying goes. But you know, Graham, you will want some money when you go into the Guards. A man cannot live in a smart regiment for nothing."

"When I go into the Guards," repeated Graham slowly. "It may be a very long when, I am afraid. Of course I mean to try my very best, as my mother had so set her heart upon it, but it's a pity it should cost such a lot all the same,—that is, if it ever comes off. But I suppose if I ever do pass the examinations, it will have to be the Guards, as she wanted it to be so. Did she ever talk to you about it, Lord Leuchars?"

"Yes, my boy, often, and I know that she had set her heart upon it. Family associations, I suppose. You see your grandfather was in the Guards, and your uncle. Yes, I think it is clearly your duty to go into the Guards as she wished it. But about that examination, now, would it not help you to have a tutor in the holidays, Graham? I know you stick to your books at home by yourself, and we could make arrangements for a tutor."

"I don't think it would do," said Graham after a momentary reflection. "You see, my father wouldn't like it much, and, oh! but that is not all," hurriedly forestalling Lord Leuchars' meditated interruption. "I really think I get on best muddling along by myself. I sometimes wish they would let me muddle along more by myself at Eton. My tutor is very kind, you know, and all that, but I often wish that he would leave me alone and not come and look over my shoulder in his pupil-room, and say——" and here he stopped and began to laugh quietly to himself.

"Well, what does he say?"

"Oh, nothing very bad," and here Graham fairly laughed out loud. "He is much too much of a gentleman to slang a fellow, and he does not want to be nasty either. He only says, 'My dear Loder!' but it's the way he says it. It's as good as a play, Lord Leuchars, it really is, and it means such a lot.

It is his polite way of saying, 'Bother you, Loder! I wonder why in the world a fellow so dense as you are should ever have been born, and what have I done that I should be condemned to teach you?'"

"'The time is out of joint; O cursèd spite!
That ever I was born to set it right,'—

eh?" suggested Lord Leuchars.

"That is about the ticket," responded Graham; "one or other of us ought never to have been born anyhow, either the time or my tutor or myself. I really feel quite sorry for him when he says 'My dear Loder!' so I would rather not have a tutor at home, please. If I did have one at all, I should like him to be the sort of fellow who had found things hard himself, but then perhaps he would not be up to much. So I would rather muddle along as I am, if you don't mind."

"Oh, I don't mind: it's no business of mine to mind, my dear boy, and after all I daresay you know what suits you; but,"—and then Lord Leuchars proceeded to make two other suggestions, both of which the boy promptly negatived.

"A crammer—no, thank you," he said, without the slightest hesitation. "I take it that our Army class at Eton is as good as any crammer's, and, besides, at Eton one knows the company one is in. And as for Militia, well, to tell you the truth, Lord Leuchars, if I am to go into the army at all, I will go in by the front door while I am about it;" and in the end, when Lord Leuchars went home that afternoon, he felt that he knew a good deal more about the workings of Graham Loder's mind than he had ever known before, and that the knowledge he had acquired was eminently satisfactory.

It is hardly in the nature of any man to accept with stolid indifference, much less with unbiassed satisfaction, the sudden announcement that his income is to be sensibly and permanently curtailed. It is hardly to be wondered, then, that the rough old Squire grumbled long and loudly when Lord Leuchars, some three or four days later, not without some

difficulty, brought him to understand that a portion at least of his late wife's money was no longer to be so entirely at his own disposal as had been the case during her lifetime. That he should have emphasised his dissatisfaction at the new state of affairs by the employment of sundry expressions more forcible than polite was, after all, only what was to be expected of a man of his calibre.

"But I've got to feed the fellow!" he proceeded to argue when he had temporarily exhausted his vituperative vocabulary.

"The two brothers put together will not cost £750 a-year to feed, my good fellow," replied Lord Leuchars, who had listened with exemplary patience to a good many strongly worded interruptions to his financial statement; "and, besides, you will only be feeding them in their holidays after all. The school expenses, clothes and all, will come out of the sum that I explained to you would be reserved for that purpose."

"But young Dick has not gone to school yet."

"So I am aware, but it is high time that he did go, all the same. He is ten or thereabouts, isn't he?"

"And there will be the devil to pay there again."

"Not the devil, but the schoolmaster," quietly suggested Lord Leuchars.

"Well, it comes to the same in the long-run," was the sullen reply.

"We'll hope not, and, besides, it will really be coming out of Graham's pocket and not yours at all. And as Graham is going to be the paymaster, it is only fair that his wishes should be consulted."

"D—n Graham! Graham is an ass."

"Not half such an ass as you choose to think him,"—and Lord Leuchars spoke more warmly than was his wont. "Don't you make any mistake, my good Loder, Graham has got an amount of common-sense and good feeling that—well, that I wish we all had. But as you seem to object to what I considered was a very liberal, in fact a much too liberal, proposal, would you like the matter to go before the Court of Chancery

and get their decision? It would save me a good deal of trouble in the long-run."

"And what the devil business is it of the Court of Chancery, or any other court, I should like to know?" hotly exclaimed the Squire.

"Nothing as yet," was the quiet answer; "but they are always ready to give advice in these matters when they are consulted, and the advice when thus given takes the form of—well, what shall we call it?—an imperial edict. And as I have had a little experience in these matters, I can tell you beforehand, if you wish it, what their advice would probably be."

"Well," said the Squire impatiently.

"They would allow you, let me see, £400, or if they were in an unusually liberal frame of mind, possibly £500 a-year for Graham's education, and take measures to see that the boy got full value for his money"—the Squire scowled as the speaker, whether intentionally or unintentionally, seemed to lay a slight emphasis on the word "his"—"and the balance of the income——"

"How about Dick?" interposed the Squire.

"Oh, they have nothing to do with Dick. He would be entirely on your hands the whole year round whether you chose to educate him or not. The money is Graham's, and Dick is out of court altogether. And the balance, as I was going to say when you interrupted me, would of course be invested in Graham's name, and allowed to go on accumulating, so that you see you would lose that £750 a-year straight off the reel, and——"

But the Squire had heard enough.

"What d—d iniquitous thieves!" and having thus summarily and to his own satisfaction disposed of the High Court of Chancery, in view of the prospect of a further curtailment of his income, as he chose to call it, he now with an ill grace conceded the point for which Lord Leuchars had been fighting for half an hour or more.

But even then the Squire had another arrow left in his quiver. For after having for the space of some twenty-four hours roundly condemned in the privacy of his own den Lord Leuchars, Graham, the Lord Chancellor, and sundry other members of society, he fell into a train of serious reflection, and shortly hit upon a wholly ingenious expedient for tempering the wind to that cruelly shorn lamb, Richard Loder, senior. He felt that the discomfort arising from the permanent diminution of his income might be materially lessened if by force of persuasion he could induce the friendly trustee to give him the opportunity of handling a fraction, even though it were but a fourth part, of his son Graham's capital. In furtherance of this object, he concluded the preliminary arrangements for the commencement of the younger boy's school education with a promptitude which would, he felt sure, commend itself favourably to Lord Leuchars' consideration As a result of this rapid manœuvring, the kind-hearted nobleman was not a little agreeably surprised when, within a week after their rather stormy interview, he received a conciliatory letter inviting him to name an early day on which it might be convenient to him to lunch at Loder, and listen to the plans arranged for "young Dick's schooling, which I am sure will meet with your approval, and to talk over a little matter of business."

"Nothing could be more satisfactory, my dear Loder," emphatically pronounced Lord Leuchars, after he had duly perused certain documents offered for his inspection by his host, who had conducted his visitor into his den after lunch was concluded. "The boy will get a good start, and I am sure that you will never regret the step you have taken. Now, let me see, did not you say in your letter that there was some other small matter?"

"Well, yes, I did say so. Don't you think, Leuchars, that the Stock Exchange is in a very queer condition, money-market all wrong and that sort of thing, eh?"

"I really don't know much about it, and what is more, I don't care much either," answered Lord Leuchars; and then,

after he had said it, the idea suddenly occurred to him that the Squire wished to consult him about some investment, and that it was therefore incumbent upon him to seem at all events to take some interest. "Consols, they are all right, are they not, and Government inscribed stock and the heavy railways and so forth?"

"Perhaps some of them are," reluctantly admitted the Squire. "I was thinking of other stocks and shares."

"Then, my dear Loder, if you will take my advice, don't think of them. Keep your money where it is, and never change an investment unless you can't help it; but if it is a case of fresh investments, you can't do better than Consols, in my opinion."

"Yes," said the Squire rather dubiously, "perhaps they are safe—safer a good deal, I should say, than any of those railways. You mark my words, Leuchars, there is a bad time coming for the railways. Now there is that bit of money of Graham's. I don't half like the idea of it being in railway stock."

"Oh, that is what you are thinking of, is it? Then let me tell you that you may make your mind quite easy on that point;" and Lord Leuchars proceeded to explain to a very unwilling auditor that in a very few years the money would be entirely under Graham's control to make ducks and drakes of it if he felt so inclined, but that in the meantime he himself as trustee was liable to be called to account for any serious depreciation of capital.

"And so on the whole, my dear Loder," he concluded, "I prefer to leave it where it is and take my chance of the loss."

The Squire, however, was not at all inclined to give up his little scheme without a further struggle.

"Don't like it, I tell you—I don't like it," and he shook his head vehemently. "You are wrong, man, quite wrong. Land, good land, is the thing nowadays. You put your money on mortgage on a good bit of stuff, and then you know that you have got hold of a good tangible security."

Receiving no immediate answer to this proposition, for the simple reason that the other was cudgelling his brain to discover the exact drift of this new-born anxiety for Graham's interests, the Squire rashly jumped to the conclusion that his lordship was "weakening," as our American cousins say, and now proceeded to drive the good nail home.

"Now the land round here—your land, for instance——"

"Oh, but I don't want a mortgage at all," hastily interposed Lord Leuchars.

"Other people may," said the Squire. "I never said you did want a mortgage, but my land is quite as good as yours any day in the week, and there you've got a tangible security, a downright good and sound four or four-and-a-half investment for—well, d—n it, for any sum you like."

The cat was fairly out of the bag at last, and the audacity of the animal fairly startled Lord Leuchars, who felt sorely tempted to say straight out that it was the tangible nature of the interest which he misdoubted perhaps even more than that of the security.

"Yes," at last he said very deliberately, "it is tangible enough, no doubt, and"—here he looked at his boots, for he had walked some three miles across country—"it is a bit sticky too. But I am afraid that if you want to put a mortgage upon it, my dear Loder, you must go to your men of business,"—the Squire winced involuntarily, a fact that did not escape the speaker's notice,—"and I have no doubt that they will arrange one for you. Four per cent or even less, that is, supposing that it is a first charge, you would have to pay——"

"Who wants your advice?" growled the Squire; but Lord Leuchars thought it as well to feign that he had not heard the remark.

"But," he continued, "I am afraid that I should hardly be justified in recommending the change of investment to"—he was just going to say "to Graham," but a happy thought struck him, and he concluded his sentence with "to the Court of Chancery."

"D—n the Court of Chancery."

"Ah! that is the remark you made the other day," was the quiet reply. "I daresay a good many other people have said the same thing, but the poor old court seems to go on all the same. And now, my dear Loder, I must thank you for a most capital luncheon, and—eh—eh, a very interesting afternoon."

When, five years later, Graham Loder came of age, Lord Leuchars duly gave the young man an account of his stewardship, and at the same time strongly advised him not to be tempted to risk his capital in any doubtful security.

"It's a thing that a young man is apt to do in haste," he remarked, "and then to repent at leisure."

"It shall stay where it is," answered Graham decidedly. "I know absolutely nothing about investments, and arithmetic was never my strong point."

"Well, you knew enough to get into the army after all, my boy," and when he had shaken hands with his late ward, with the feeling that henceforward their meetings were likely to be few and far between, Lord Leuchars found himself wondering whether, amidst the pomps and vanities of his new life, the young Guardsman would be likely to preserve the simple and generous instincts of his Eton days.

And now on this evening he felt that the question he had asked himself five years ago had been answered to his whole and entire satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV.

A FAMILY PARTY.

NEITHER at the Mote nor at Loders was there an atmosphere of entire peace in the domestic circle that night.

It was a matter of absolute necessity—such at least was the light in which John Fox, the Mote head-keeper, put it—that Tasker Wood and sundry other minor coverts should be shot in the week before Christmas. An October session of the House prolonged late into November, and other causes of delay, had thrown the Mote shooting arrangements sadly out of gear, and had sorely tried the temper and the patience of John Fox, who was accustomed to seeing things done at their proper time and season.

"Never heard tell of such a thing, not in the whole course of my born days," he would mutter to himself as he watched the shortening days. "Here's half the month gone, and his lordship messing about up in Lunnon still. What's the good of me rearing my pheasants if nobody ain't agoing to shoot them?"

And when Lord Leuchars on his arrival early in December had suggested that, all things considered, it might be as well to postpone the shooting of the coverts till Christmas was over, John spoke out his mind so strongly that his lordship wisely forbore to press the point.

"Shoot 'em again after Christmas, my lord, in welcome, if

as how you have got parties coming as wants a bit of shooting. But it is downright flying in the face of Providence not to shoot them, or leastways what you may call brush them through, afore Christmas comes. There's the leaves been well off a month or more, and they cocks a-crowing away at night so as you can hear them two mile away, and bright moonlight nights and all, and then you says we'll leave them till after Christmas, you says. Why, who do you think is agoing to keep all my pheasants together for another fortnight or three weeks, I'd like to know? Not John Fox, nor nobody else neither, and all they ironstone chaps idle half the time. Well, they're your lordship's coverts, in course, and your lordship's birds, leastways it's you as pays for the rearing of them. But I will say as it ain't nowise fair on the men as watches them or on they pheasants themselves, as good a lot of birds as ever I clapped eyes upon, to put off shooting them till Jannery. But have your own way, my lord, I shan't say nothing; but I'll tell you plainly as I don't think as if they ain't shot now, there'll be six blessed birds left as you will shoot."

Appalled by the prospect of a revolt *en masse* among the pheasants, or out of consideration for the keeper's feelings, Lord Leuchars then and there undertook to shoot the coverts in a fortnight's time, and shortly issued his invitations. To a man of his methodical habits a fortnight was none too long a time for perfecting his arrangements. The proper constitution of a covert-shooting party was, regarded in the light of a social duty, a very important matter, almost as important perhaps in the country as the taking charge of a local bill in the Upper House during the London season. If either thing was to be done at all it must be well done, otherwise it was better to leave it alone altogether.

"Let me see, Fox—how many guns will you want?"

"Eight, my lord. I don't say as by rights we didn't ought to have nine in Tasker Wood. There is places there where some of they messy cocks always will manage to get back, and I've never seen the man yet as could keep them up. But we

can do with eight in the other woods. But there, my lord, in course it's just as your lordship pleases."

This was encouraging so far as it went, and correctly interpreted by Lord Leuchars as meant to imply that, as a reward for having given in with a good grace in the matter of shooting the woods before Christmas, he would be kindly excused by the keeper if he brought on to the scene of action one gun too many or even one too few.

"It shall be eight," he said to himself. "Eight is a good number, and besides it leaves a margin in case Jack Treherne, who is sure to think he is engaged, may care to turn up at the last minute."

And with that his lordship proceeded to issue his invitations, and after the interchange of a good many letters, including, of course, here and there a refusal, on reviewing his list of acceptances he came to the satisfactory conclusion that the party could hardly have been improved upon. There was the proper admixture of youth and age, of keenness and steady shooting; most of the men either knew each other already or at any rate were likely to have plenty of tastes in common, and the various wives and daughters who were to accompany their respective belongings were in their different ways either interesting or amusing.

Under these circumstances it was only natural that the organiser of the party should feel a little bit annoyed when in the course of the evening Lady Leuchars broke a long silence by suddenly remarking, "Leuchars, I quite forgot to tell you before that I had a letter from Lady Lunscombe to say that they will not be able to come next week. Sir Thomas is laid up with influenza and bronchitis, and there is not the slightest chance of his being well enough to travel."

"Dear me, I am sorry, very sorry indeed. Poor old Tom!" and Lord Leuchars spoke with genuine, even though slightly selfish, feeling.

For Sir Thomas was perhaps, on the whole, the guest who could be least spared in a country-house party. He was

a very old friend of the family, an especial crony of Lord Leuchars, and had just retired from the diplomatic service.

Having spent most of his life at various capitals in Europe, and therefore knowing the manners and customs of the men of pretty well every nation, in addition to being an excellent sportsman Sir Thomas was a brilliant talker, always to be depended upon for a good story, and therefore a *persona grata* alike at the dinner-table and in the smoking-room.

"Yes, we shall miss old Tom and his cheery laugh, shan't we, Betty?" resumed Lord Leuchars after a short pause, appealing to his daughter, who, being immersed in a game of patience, only looked up and nodded. "And now I shall have to look out for some one to take his place. Who in the world am I to ask? I must send for my pocket-book." Just as his hand was on the bell Lady Leuchars stopped him.

"You won't have to ask any one, Leuchars. I thought all about it for you, and as you were out I put pen to paper and wrote to Lady Selcombe."

"But she does not shoot, my dear lady, surely!" and Lord Leuchars looked so much aghast at the idea of a rather elderly lady being tacked on to his shooting-party that his wife and daughter fairly burst out laughing.

"Of course she does not shoot herself," explained Lady Leuchars, "but she is going to bring Algie Chevely with her."

The lady in question, be it remarked, was the second wife of a wealthy brewer who had been rewarded for his political exertions with a peerage, and the young man Algernon Chevely was her stepson and heir to the title.

"Algie Chevely!" and now Lord Leuchars looked even more disconcerted than he had been by the idea of Lady Selcombe's shooting. "Algie Chevely! I don't want him here at all. I hope you have not really invited him, Julia?"

"I thought I had already explained to you that I had asked him. Why don't you want to have him? I am sure that he is a very harmless young man;" here Lord Leuchars made a gesture of dissent, but said nothing. "And besides, I have

heard you say yourself that he is a very good shot. I think that it is quite time that he did come here again. Now that his father is a hopeless invalid, Algie practically takes his position, and it is such a lovely place."

None of these arguments, consequent or inconsequent, appealed in the slightest degree to Lord Leuchars. It was bad enough to hear that a valuable and highly cherished member of his party was *hors de combat;* to learn that the vacancy was to be filled by a young man whom he especially disliked was something more than ordinarily annoying.

"I am afraid that the young man will never fill his father's place, my dear Julia," he said gravely—"not at least in the way that it ought to be filled. Selcombe is a man for whom I have always had the highest respect, but as for this young fellow—well, if he has got or is going to have such a lovely place of his own, I wish to goodness he would stop there, or at all events not come here. However," with a sigh of resignation, "as you have asked him, I suppose he will have to come. He is just the sort of aggravating animal who will be sure not to have any other engagement; but I wish that you had consulted me in the matter;" and having entered this mild protest, Lord Leuchars shortly afterwards withdrew to his own room, and burying himself in a pile of papers relating to County Council work, temporarily forgot his annoyance.

"I cannot see why your father should so much mind my having asked poor Algie here, Betty," murmured Lady Leuchars, when she found herself alone with her daughter. "He is very pleasant in the house, and I should have thought that one shooting man was as good as another."

If the remark was intended to elicit from Betty any reversal of the verdict which her father had given against his unwelcome guest, the result was hardly satisfactory.

"Perhaps so, if it is only a question of killing those wretched pheasants," replied Betty, without taking her eyes off her cards; "but apart from that, I should say that there is a good deal of difference, if you ask me. Sir Thomas happens to be

a very charming old gentleman, and Mr Chevely a very uncharming young—eh—man. And now, mother dear, as we are not likely to agree about it, we will change the subject, and you shall teach me that new patience of yours."

Nor did the evening at Loders go off in a wholly auspicious manner. It so happened that Lord Leuchars was relying on Dick Loder to complete the number of his guns, but for an hour or two, at all events, it was a matter of grave doubt whether that young gentleman might not also be a most involuntary absentee.

Signs were not wanting that the master of the house had sat down to dinner in a most unsettled frame of mind, and Graham, who was watching him narrowly, saw that he now and again cast glances at his younger son which plainly indicated that he was seeking legitimate occasion for a quarrel. From Dick's cheery unconsciousness of having in any way offended, his brother argued that, as yet, there had been no collision between the two; and partly by way of staving off the evil hour as long as possible, partly in the hope that, if nothing untoward occurred at the dinner-table, his father might, under the benignant influence of his bottle of port, recover his equilibrium, he contrived to inaugurate a lively conversation on the subject of some new arrivals in the county with his aunt, who had acted as lady of the house since her sister-in-law's death. Miss Loder, as it happened, was, like other spinster ladies of a certain age and no particular vocation in life, endowed with a tenacious memory for names and places, and afflicted by a mania for tracing out real and imaginary relationships and connections between her own and her neighbours' families. That power of research which Soapy Sponge brought to bear upon the study of Mogg's cab-fares, and the modern representation of Soapy utilises on the more perfect understanding of Ruff's 'Turf Guide,' Miss Loder had employed in the pursuit of knowledge of Debret's 'Peerage,' and somebody else's 'County Families,' with what were to herself the happiest results.

Possibly the slight deafness which to a certain extent precluded her from taking part in a general conversation was a blessing in disguise, as, preventing a distraction of ideas, it enabled her in a crowded room to concentrate her entire attraction on that particular pedigree, genealogy, or relationship which happened for the time to be foremost in her thoughts. Or it may have been that the zeal for an apparently unrewarding study was, if not an absolute result of the physical infirmity, at any rate a merciful dispensation of Providence sent to mitigate the almost inevitable feeling of isolation.

"Aunt Rachel," inquired Graham, "do *you* happen to know anything of those new people who have taken Thorncliffe?"

"Thorncliffs, my dear? What Thorncliffs? Do you mean the Thorncliffs of Barrow or the Thorncliffs of Liston, or did you say Thorneycliffe? They are of course all branches of the same family, but, eh! what did you say, my dear?"

For Dick, who was sitting on his aunt's less deaf side, and, having a voice to which the good lady was more accustomed, was commonly called upon to act as interpreter, now explained that Thorncliffe was the name of the house and not of the people about whom Graham was inquiring.

"I think their name is Gwillam or Gwilliam," he shouted to his aunt.

Fortunately Miss Loder knew people of both names, and was even able to show that the two names were originally identical, there being acquaintances of her own, indubitable first cousins, some of whom spelt the name with and some without the *i*. Then there ensued speculations as to whether the people who had taken Thorncliffe were second or only third cousins of Miss Loder's friends; and finally it was proved conclusively that the name, whether it was Gwillam or Gwilliam, really was or ought to be Williams. This, with the addition of a few digressions through various branch-lines connected with the main system, kept the conversation fairly afloat during dinner-time, and it was not until after Miss Loder had left the table and he had helped himself to his second glass

of port that the Squire, who had been silently nursing his wrath, suddenly addressed Dick.

"Where did those snipe, that we had just now, come from?"

"From the brook meadows," answered Dick, and he was proceeding in happy innocence to give a full and true account of his afternoon's sport when his father roughly interrupted him.

"Then you have been poaching on Mote land again, have you, sir? No wonder that Leuchars called you a loafing, good-for-nothing poacher."

"Lord Leuchars said that I was a loafing, good-for-nothing poacher!" exclaimed Dick, astounded at the sudden attack, and hardly able for the moment to believe the evidence of his own ears.

"Yes, sir, he did," replied the Squire, with more emphasis than veracity, and for the next few minutes he continued to storm at Dick, blending fact with fiction, and multiplying the lad's sins of omission and commission till he was fairly out of breath himself.

It was perhaps hardly to be expected that any lad of Dick's age, or at any rate of his calibre, would listen in absolute silence to what was, from his own point of view, a wholly unprovoked attack of this character.

"Cockered up and patted on the back at school till you have begun to think that the whole world belongs to you, and that you can go where you like and do what you like! I'll have none of that d—d nonsense about here, sir, I can promise you."

This had been one of the mildest paragraphs in the Squire's denunciation, which had been so plentifully embellished with invectives, and had wandered so far afield that it might have taxed the subtlest intellect to discover where the original ground of offence lay.

It may not be denied, however, that this particular section of a very general impeachment was flavoured by a certain spice of truth. Young Dick Loder was not, it well may be, more

conceited or more self-satisfied than are most lads of his age, least of all was he either outwardly or aggressively conceited. But it is hardly reasonable to suppose that any human boy will pass altogether unscathed through the fiery ordeal of schoolboy hero-worship.

"There was nothing," said his admirers at Marlborough—and they were many—"that Dickie Loder does not do better than any one else, if he once sets his mind to it."

Extravagant though this praise may sound, the results of his school career partially vindicated the truth of the remark. All the small kingdoms of the school world that seemed to be worth the trouble of annexation had fallen to him by right of conquest.

The VI. Form prize, and all the important prizes for special branches of scholarship—Latin Prose, Greek Iambics, and so forth—the captaincy of the cricket XI. and football XV., and other minor distinctions, he had won without undue exertion; and when there was practically nothing left for Marlborough to offer, he had gone in for a grouped set of scholarships at Oxford, and coming out *facile princeps* in the examination, had elected to go to St Hilary's in preference to either Merton or Oriel, either of which colleges was anxious to receive him. And after this apparently crowning triumph there had been yet one more summer term at Marlborough, a period of glorious idleness and well-earned relaxation, culminating in a memorable victory over Rugby at Lord's, in which his all-round performances had been selected for special commendation.

More than one happy urchin in the course of those two great days had suddenly clutched his father's arm and whispered eagerly—

"There, father, look, that is Loder!"

"Loder, my boy, what Loder?"

"The Loder, of course—Dickie Loder, our captain, about the biggest swell we have ever had at Marlborough."

And the father, obediently looking, had seen neither an

Adonis nor a Hercules, but only the slightly built figure of a bright-faced boy with dark hair and laughing eyes.

"Is he a very great cricketer? He does not look very strong."

"You just wait till you see him tackle a fellow, then. He is as hard as nails, and tremendously clever too. You know he got a scholarship at St Hilary's, but Mr —— says that he ought to have gone in for the Balliol by rights. He says that Loder is much better than Short was when he got the Balliol. And Short got the I.C.S. later on: I wonder if Loder will go in for the I.C.S.?"

"I wonder," repeated the father as, in duty bound, he now observed the young hero more attentively.

"Yes! it's an intelligent face, and," as his eyes wandered over the well-set-up frame, "I daresay he is stronger than he looks. Well, if he is all that you say he is, I hope you will tread in his shoes some day, my boy."

"Tread in Dickie Loder's shoes! By Jove!"

To the hero-worshipper's mind the suggestion savoured of irreverence. Had either the boy or his father been, as the saying goes, gifted to know, Dickie Loder, for all his smiling face and sunny temperament, had inherited something more than a mere grain of his father's hot temper and strong will, though in his case these shortcomings were partially redeemed by a full share of native generous instincts.

Small wonder, then, that now, absolutely innocent of any ground of offence, and smarting under a sense of injustice, the boy warmly took up the cudgels in his own defence, and totally disregarding Graham's quiet efforts to throw oil upon the troubled waters, so hotly argued the matter that he was finally ordered to leave the room. For some minutes after Dick had, with some show of reluctance, and rather in obedience to a sign made by Graham than to his father's mandate, retired from the table and the discussion, there was an absolute silence in the room. Graham, thoroughly disgusted by his father's unjust and intemperate attack upon his brother, and yet con-

scious that any attempt at active interposition on his own part was more likely to add fuel to the flames than to be productive of any benefit to Dick's cause, felt no inclination to converse, and it was ultimately left to the Squire to volunteer the first remark.

"Upon my honour, Graham, you are what one might call a pretty cheery companion. You neither drink nor speak, but sit there like a mute at a funeral party. Dick—confound the fellow—has got a tongue in his head, at all events. He is worth a dozen of a fellow like you."

"That, sir, I am perfectly aware of," was the quiet reply. "I am not much of a talker at the best of times, and I did not think that you were quite in a humour for conversation to-night."

"Oh, you didn't, didn't you? and pray why not?" and the Squire paused in the act of filling up his glass.

"Well, I don't know exactly," replied Graham, and then hesitating for a moment before taking the final plunge into the inquiry as to the cause of the Squire's late ebullition, he made up his mind that it would be unwise to betray Lord Leuchars' confidence, and that it would be better to leave his father to give his own version of the story.

"Were you not a little hard upon the boy to-night, sir? I did not see exactly what he had done to annoy you."

"And pray what business is that of yours, sir? May I not say what I like to my own son? What does it matter to you?"

"Well, you see, sir, Dick happens to be my brother, that is all."

The Squire put down his glass and stared at the speaker hard, almost as if he was prepared to dispute the relationship. But there was no answering look, Graham being apparently absorbed in the delicate operation of peeling a pear. And presently, after a few grumbling remarks, the Squire, as Graham had anticipated, launched out into a one-sided version of the original grievance, and as in the absence of contradiction

his ill-temper gradually evaporated, he even condescended in a roundabout manner to enlighten his companion as to the plans which—for so he put it—he had with much forethought made for Dick's benefit.

"And then," he concluded, "Leuchars had the face to tell me that he thought the fellow was cut out for a gamekeeper!"

"Ah, well, that is one degree better than a poacher," and Graham smiled as he remembered that the alleged grievance had been as to the legitimate ownership of a paltry snipe; and then, anxious to avoid any controversial matter, went on hurriedly, "Well, yes, sir, I will own that it was very annoying and all that; but after all, poor Dick can hardly be held responsible for the rector's death, nor could Lord Leuchars be expected, even if he had the power, to keep open a place for five years or so for a boy who after all might or might not choose to become a parson. For without going so far as to say what Lord Leuchars said, which evidently annoyed you, I cannot see that Dick has even shown any proclivity that way, sir."

"Proclivity, be—hanged!" replied the Squire, having, now that he had aired his grievance, so far recovered his temper as to be able to substitute "hanged" for the stronger term that was on the tip of his tongue. For, strange to relate, even rough-tongued Dick Loder had in his elder son's presence a feeling of the same sort that once prompted a young Guardsman not always noted for the due measuring of his words to say, "One always has to mind one's *p*'s and *q*'s when that Loder is about. If he happens to catch you tripping, he don't say anything, but he just gives you a sort of look with those eyes of his that makes you feel as if a tap of cold water had been turned upon your back."

Having satisfactorily disposed of the term proclivity, the Squire now quite suddenly shifted his ground. The iniquities both of Lord Leuchars and of Dick were to be temporarily condoned or altogether forgiven, and the real offender was discovered in the person of the late rector, who had com-

mitted the unprecedented crime of dying at an inconvenient season.

"He might have gone on another dozen years or more if he had only taken ordinary care of himself."

"I don't think he was ever a very strong man," suggested Graham.

"All the more reason why he should have taken care of himself, then. Why couldn't he behave like a reasonable being and have his services at proper times instead of at eight o'clock and seven o'clock in the morning, when only a pack of women and almshouse-people go?"

"Come, come, sir," said Graham, smiling; "I sometimes go myself when I am at home."

"More fool you, then," was the rude reply. "But, then, we all know why you go, Master Graham. Dick is no hyprocrite, thank heavens."

For a moment there was no answer. Graham's colour rose slightly, but there was no trace of irritation in his voice when he spoke.

"No, sir, I am sure he is not. I hope that I am not one myself either. But I used to go with my mother to that service: it was her favourite service."

Looking very straight in his father's face as he said this, Graham was instantly conscious that he had struck the right chord at last. Hot-tempered, rough-tongued, violent, overbearing, all these and stronger epithets men were apt to ascribe to Loder of Loders, but it could never be laid to his charge that he had not loved—nay, even idolised—the dark-eyed woman whose heart he had wooed and won long years ago down in the Cotswold country. Nothing short of marvellous had been the refining influence which the late Mrs Loder had during her married life exercised over her husband, toning down the acerbities, and bringing out the brighter side of what was at the best a cross-grained nature. As according to his lights—rough and imperfect lights—he had faithfully kept his plighted troth, had loved and cherished the gentle wife till death did them

part, so too when she was taken from him he had never so completely hardened his heart as to blot from off its surface the memory of days of the years spent in her company. On the instant, as Graham spoke, there came back to the Squire's mind the thought of the times when he had walked down the drive to meet the mother and her son on their return from the Sunday morning walk, and, so thinking, he stretched out his hand to Graham. Though the latter could only imperfectly catch the purport of the few muttered words that accompanied the action, the iron grip of his father's hand was sufficient to convince him that for the time, at all events, all unkindness of thought was buried.

When the brief emotional stage was past and gone, conversation flowed on easily enough, and it was not till long after the coffee had made its appearance that the two left the dining-room.

"Then I may tell Dick, sir," said Graham, as, after following the Squire to his den, he took leave of him for the night, "that he may consider what was said to-night as unsaid."

"You may tell him what you like, my dear boy," replied the Squire, still on his best behaviour. "I know you are to be trusted when all is said and done,"—and those two parted on better terms with each other than had been the case for many a long day.

To Dick, who, his undergraduate pride sorely wounded by his ignominious dismissal from the dinner-table, was more than half inclined to stand on his dignity and refuse the proffered olive-branch, Graham spoke a few words of common-sense advice which shortly brought the young gentleman to a better frame of mind.

"Of course, my dear fellow, if you choose to ride the high horse, and cut off your nose to spite your face, there is nothing to prevent your doing so. But, if you take my advice, you will meet your father at breakfast to-morrow as if nothing had happened, and go off to the Mote next week and shoot for all you are worth."

"But did Lord Leuchars really say that I was a loafing poacher, Gra.?"

"If he had said so, it wouldn't have hurt you, would it? Hard words never broke any bones yet, and you ought to know yourself how Lord Leuchars treats you, which is the main point after all. Use your own intelligence, my dear Dick, and believe half you hear and rather more than half you see."

After this diplomatic speech, Dick, who would have been cruelly disappointed to miss the only chance he had ever had of shooting the Mote coverts for the first time of asking, made an unconditional surrender.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CROMWELL ROAD.

It was on the morning after the events recorded in the last chapter that Mrs Laurence Ferrier was waiting for her husband in the breakfast-room of a large house in the Cromwell Road. Having made the tea and read her own letters, the lady now amused herself by sorting her husband's rather voluminous correspondence, which she divided into two packets — town letters, which for the most part might be held to represent business, and those with a country post-mark. One of the latter class presently engaged her especial attention: the handwriting was unfamilar to her, there was a coronet on the envelope, and the post-mark was partially illegible.

"It's something —hampton," she murmured to herself, "but what 'hampton' is it?" and she was just carrying it to the window in order to resolve the difficulty under a better light, when the door opened and her husband entered the room.

His wife looked up from her occupation, and the bright smile with which she greeted his entrance at once told the tale that there was no secret between the pair, and that fifteen years of married life had only brought them all the closer together. If now and again in his heart of hearts Laurence found cause to regret that no children had blessed their union, if he sighed as he reflected that with himself the family name would become

extinct, he consoled himself by lavishing the more affection on his young wife, to whom for many years before their marriage he had stood in the position of guardian.

There were those who said that the man Laurence Ferrier was a living contradiction to the common theory that people who drift into the habit of thinking aloud are on the highroad to lunacy. For few members of society could be found more clear-headed and practical, better read or more highly cultivated, than the senior partner of the firm Ferrier, Dowson, & Wood, solicitors and attorneys.

"Well, I think that on the whole I understand myself better than other people do."

This was the excuse he had once offered for himself, when his wife, playfully rallying him, had remarked that he seemed to be much more conversational to himself when alone in his dressing-room than to his guests at the dinner-table, or even to the lady herself in the privacy of their domestic life. But though he more commonly preferred to play the part of listener in a general conversation, on those rare occasions when he did lay himself out to talk men and women alike listened not only with attention, but with a growing conviction that the speaker had a deeper and more perfect knowledge of his subject, whatever it might be, than most of his neighbours.

If it were a misnomer to call him a popular man, the reason lay rather in the fact that he never moved out of his way to court popularity, than in the lack of qualities to command it. Certain it was that those who knew him best liked him best, and that men who knew him only slightly soon grew to trust him implicitly.

It was no idle compliment that was once paid him by a well-known M.F.H. in the Midlands, with whose hounds Laurence hunted once a-week during the season.

"By Jove! sir, that man Ferrier rides pretty straight," remarked a young squire who was jogging homewards in the master's company after a long and tiring day.

"Yes, and walks pretty straight too: as straight a man as ever stepped is Laurence Ferrier," and as the master, a man of few words, had known Laurence for a good thirty years, his opinion was well worth having.

"How late you are this morning, Laurence, you lazy man!" remarked Mrs Ferrier as she put the letter on the table.

"That, my dear woman," and Laurence looked at his watch, "is a purely feminine idea of punctuality. The man is late if the woman happens to be downstairs two minutes before him. But the man may have to wait an hour for the woman without her being late. It is now three minutes past nine exactly."

"Then you are late, three minutes late by your own confession! But to show what a forgiving person I am, I have been sorting your letters for you."

"So it seems," said Laurence drily as he looked at the two heaps, and then gathering them into a bundle, carelessly tossed them on to a convenient chair. "Now, may I have some tea, please?"

Mrs Ferrier poured out the tea in silence, not without a slight feeling of disappointment. Curiosity even in small matters when once aroused is apt to be *exigeante*, and so the lady found herself more than once furtively glancing in the direction of the chair upon which the letters were now lying, wondering in her own mind where the one particular letter had come from, and annoyed with herself for so wondering. All the time her husband, though apparently absorbed in the important business of eating his breakfast, was watching her with a good deal of suppressed amusement, and just when she least expected it, he rose from his seat, and, picking up the whole pile of letters, walked round the table and deposited them by his wife's plate.

"I don't know which is your Pears's soap, little woman, but take your choice."

"Pears's soap, Laurence! What do you mean?"

"She'll never be happy till she gets it," and laughing at his now blushing wife, he returned to his breakfast.

"Well, do you know, there was one of your country letters which puzzled me," admitted Mrs Ferrier; "I did not know the writing, and I could not make out the post-town, and it had got a coronet on it. Oh, here it is: now, who is it from, Laurence? The postmark is something —hampton."

"If you open it you can see."

"Well," explained Mrs Ferrier, as, having opened the letter, she proceeded to find out the name and address of the writer, "it is from The Mote, Westhampton—I was sure it was something —hampton—and it is signed 'Leuchars.'"

"Oh! Well, now, my dear woman, as you have satisfied your own curiosity on that point, perhaps you will satisfy mine by telling me what Leuchars is writing about."

"But who is Leuchars, Laurence, and how do you know him so well or he know you so well? He begins to you, 'Dear old Lorrie'!"

"Does he?" and as his thoughts wandered back to school and college days, he sighed involuntarily as men do when something strikes a long silent chord in their memory. "It's many a long day since any one called me by that name, and then it was only he and one or two more. Curious that he should go back to it too. I was only talking to him in the Carlton six weeks back, and I should have noticed it if he had called me Lorrie then. But I suppose that it came natural to him on paper."

This was spoken rather to himself than to Mrs Ferrier, but she now repeated a question which he had practically ignored.

"Where did you know Lord Leuchars so well, Laurence, and when?"

"Where and when—what very leading questions! Where: well, let me see; at school, at a preparatory school first, then at Harrow for five years, then at Oxford for about another four years, and more or less in London ever since! Twenty-five years ago I was Fred Lisle's best man."

"Fred Lisle?"

"Yes, he was Fred Lisle then, and not much more expectation of becoming a lord than I might have. But first one boy died, and then another, and eventually when an uncle or a cousin died he came in for the title and the place, and now I suppose when he dies it will go to some other uncle or cousin. But now, as I have answered all your questions, may I hear what is in the letter?"

"Well, he wants you," began Mrs Ferrier, hurriedly glancing through the contents of the letter—"yes, he wants you to find a clergyman, must be a gentleman and a good Churchman, and——"

"Give me the letter, please." And taking it from her hand he made himself master of the contents, frowning more than once as he did so, until, as he came to a postscript, his face relaxed, and putting down the letter he sat back in his chair, and finally burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"What one might call a bit of family concoction, this postscript. Listen, little woman! 'I don't think that I should care about a man with a lot of hobbledehoy sons who might make calf-love to Betty and expect me to give them shooting.'"

"It is funny," replied Mrs Ferrier, laughing; "but, tell me, Laurence, what are you going to do?"

"Do? why, nothing. I am not a Whitely or a bishop. Where am I going to find a parson, a gentleman," quoting from the letter, "a good Churchman, not quite a pauper, conscientious parish priest, no hobbledehoy sons, and I don't know what else besides. Of course there are plenty of such men about, but I don't know where to lay my hand on one at a minute's notice. He will have either to go to his bishop or else to advertise."

"But, Laurence," exclaimed his wife after a momentary pause, "why not Mr Balfour? He is a gentleman, and a good Churchman, and he has got—there now, you are talking away to yourself again—what were you saying?"

What Laurence had murmured to himself was, "Out of the

mouth of babes and sucklings," but it was hardly worth while repeating, so he prudently substituted a more euphonious equivalent—

"That my wife was a very clever woman. Balfour, you said; yes, why not Balfour?" and he re-read the letter with more care.

"Upon my honour, darling, I am very much obliged to you for a very happy inspiration. The fact is that when a man has been out of harness for so many years—not his fault, of course—one is apt to forget his real vocation. But I am sure that Balfour would do well anything that he took in hand to do, and he told me the other day that the doctor had given him a clean bill of health at last. Anyhow, there can be no harm in my mentioning the matter to him, and if he takes to the idea kindly, I will run down into the country and have a talk with Leuchars as he suggests."

In pursuance of this rapidly formed idea, an hour later Ferrier rang the bell of a little detached house standing in a small garden of its own in a remote corner of Bayswater.

"Good morning, Sarah," he remarked with a friendly nod to the spruce parlour-maid who after some delay answered the bell. "You don't expect visitors at this time of day, do you? Is Mr Balfour in by any chance?"

"No, sir, he has just stepped out. But I don't think he will be long gone. Miss May is in the drawing-room, if she will do, sir; or would you like to leave a message for the master?"

"Well, no," said Ferrier, consulting his watch; "I think I can wait a few minutes anyhow. I will go and see Miss May. She will perhaps be able to tell me how long her father is likely to be. Don't you bother to come, Sarah; I think I know my way by this time;" and with the easy confidence of a man thoroughly at home in the house he crossed the tiny hall, and, walking upstairs, turned sharply to the right, and for a minute or more stood listening at the partially open door of the drawing-room to the sweet

voice of a girl who was playing and singing to herself, wholly unconscious of the presence of an audience.

There was a note of melancholy in the words of the song that riveted the listener's attention, as he stood there in the half-uncertain attitude of a person who hesitates to enter a billiard-room during the playing of a break.

At the conclusion of a verse he gently pushed open the door and peeped into the room without disturbing the musician, who, intent upon her occupation and sitting with her back to the door, still remained unaware of his presence.

"The wind that I sigh to
May visit thy main,
But, ah me, I shall never
See England again!"

When Laurence Ferrier, advancing by cautious steps, at length stood close behind her chair, it was easy to gather from the softened expression of his face that the singer, a fair-haired and blue-eyed girl of an unmistakably Saxon type of beauty, was very near to his heart, and that the tinge of sadness which marked the intonation of the pathetic words of the song had power to awake a responsive echo in his breast.

As the last words of the verse died away the girl sighed, and her fingers for a minute strayed carelessly over the notes, while she softly repeated the refrain—

"Ah me, I shall never
See England again!"

"'Never' is a long word, my sweet one," murmured Laurence, with the result that the music-stool came to the ground with a crash, and the late occupant, stumbling backward, would inevitably have followed suit had not the originator of the impending disaster caught her in his arms.

"What a shame of you to startle me like that, Mr Ferrier! You very nearly made me break my neck,—in fact I am not

sure that I have not broken it," exclaimed the girl, as, recovering from her surprise, she turned round and confronted the interloper. If the words were gaily spoken, he noted at once that there were traces of recent tears in the speaker's eyes; and having some suspicion, or even foreknowledge, of the cause that was troubling her, once again, as often in times past, Laurence Ferrier set himself seriously to work to comfort and reassure the girl's doubting heart.

From her very earliest days, almost from the cradle, May Balfour, who had never known a mother's love, had turned to Laurence Ferrier, her father's dearest friend, for sympathy in the short-lived joys and sorrows of childhood. Nor had she ever found that sympathy fail her: it was a bank upon which she might draw with the certainty that her credit was unlimited.

The broken toy, carefully put aside to await one of Ferrier's visits, was either deftly mended by his clever fingers or promptly replaced by his ready purse; the child's first letter, written in huge roundhand, written if with immense pride, yet as it may not be denied at the cost of some self-denial, was carefully preserved in a drawer where he kept his most cherished reliques.

May, the baby May of early nursery days, was a warm-hearted and loving little person. But the forms of love which she bestowed on the three who came first in her childish estimation were of wholly different types. Her father, in whose sight—as now the memento, and giving promise one day to be the image, of the lost but ever-loved wife—the child had by gradual process become precious beyond all word and thought, it had for some years been part of her infantine creed to worship at a distance, at first even less as her father than as the one who loved best and had been best loved by the sweet-faced unknown mother, whose face was only familiar to her from a coloured photograph that looked down on her as she lay in her cot. Possibly Mr Balfour was one of those men who have no innate sympathy with children, and certainly

until May was five or six years old he was inclined to resent as an unjustifiably cruel blow the dispensation of Providence which had in the course of a brief twenty-four hours robbed him of the sweet and sympathetic companionship of his wife and left in her place a motherless baby girl. As rector of a growing parish in the suburbs of London he had tried to forget his sorrow in hard work, and it was only when in obedience to an imperative order from a well-known doctor, backed by the earnest entreaties of his kindly diocesan, he had resigned his living and retired into the country for entire rest and change of scene, that he first took much notice of his daughter, and ended so completely by falling back on the child for companionship that it became impossible to dissociate from his mind the idea that her presence from the first had been an indispensable condition of his existence. When, after some years of inactivity, anxiety to renew his work had dictated another visit to the great and most sympathetic doctor of the day, he was warned that his health was still in a precarious condition, and that a return to work would be almost infallibly followed by a recurrence of certain ominous symptoms.

"The fact of the matter, my dear sir," said the gentleman, "is just this. You tried to concentrate into five years the work of twenty. Now nature is revenging herself, and I put it before you plainly that for some few years to come you will do well to occupy your mind with your child's education, and otherwise take life easily. If you will be content to follow my advice, and all goes well, I think I may promise you that you will be able to go into harness again in time with a new lease of life and many years of useful work in front of you."

Thus advised, Mr Balfour had reluctantly relinquished his project, but shortly afterwards had migrated to London in order to give his daughter those advantages in the way of masters and classes which were practically unattainable luxuries in the country.

A potent member in the small household, to whom both father and daughter had good reason to be grateful, was Mrs Anna Philipson, daughter of an old north-country retainer of the late Mrs Balfour's family. She had originally acted in the capacity of nursery-maid, and later on as lady's-maid to her late mistress, and on that lady's sudden and tragic death had undertaken the sole charge of the orphaned child. If Mrs Anna's temper was at times short, and her methods of discipline somewhat drastic, there was no more doubt of her true-hearted affection for her nursling than of the fact that the delicate, and in early days rather fractious, child had been fairly kept alive through more than one serious illness by the good woman's jealous and assiduous care.

As the child passed from the stage of infancy to girlhood, and schoolroom lessons gradually took the place of nursery instruction, Mistress Anna, standing much on her dignity, had resented the intrusion of governesses, with one and all of whom she lived in a state of constant friction; and the conviction of the impossibility of a permanent prolongation of a dual control, under which the child's education must inevitably have suffered, had been the last deciding cause which led Mr Balfour to form the plan of returning to London. It had been suggested to him that a simpler course would be to pension off the old nurse and install an elderly governess in her place; but he shrank from the idea of wounding a valued and attached servant's feelings, as well as from the responsibility of banishing from his household the one person who thoroughly understood his daughter's still delicate organisation.

With all her devotion to her father, and attachment to her loyal old nurse, it was on Laurence Ferrier that May bestowed the most unalloyed affection. Originally an acquaintance of the late Mrs Balfour's family — indeed, some said a disappointed lover of the lady herself—Laurence had contracted a warm friendship with Mr Balfour, whom he had barely known by sight in the days when the two men were

undergraduates at Oxford together. In the hope of alleviating by his sympathetic companionship the feeling of utter desolation that had overtaken his friend on his young wife's death, Laurence, then a bachelor, had made Mr Balfour's rectory-house his home for the first year of the latter's widowerhood, and he soon lost his heart to the blue-eyed baby, whose presence her father rather tolerated than welcomed.

As May grew from infancy into childhood, he who passed among men, lacking the curiosity to look beneath the surface, as an upright but yet shrewd and impassive lawyer, became the child's sympathising confidant and most dearly cherished playmate. And even the nurse, jealous, like women of her class, of outside interference with her charge, was fain to make an exception in his favour, and to recognise the value of his influence. On a nature inclined to rebel against unexplained restrictions, and unprepared to accept the ruling of Aristotle, that for a child the fact without the reason thereof is an all-sufficient first principle, half playfully and half in earnest Laurence brought common-sense reasoning and convincing argument to bear.

"I am no believer," he once remarked to May's father when the latter had been inclined to smile at the pains taken to prove to the child, then six years old, the wisdom of her nurse's veto upon some childish scheme—"I am no believer in the doctrine of passive obedience when applied to a rational animal. You may beat your cat if it steals your cream, because the poor brute beast has no better understanding, but it is surely as much a part of a child's training to learn reasons why some things are to be avoided and others done as the mere fact that they are to be so avoided and so done. Now, May has gone away with the conviction that your old Anna is a person whose advice is worth following; ten minutes ago she thought that she herself was an injured individual, and Anna a disagreeable old toad."

And after a momentary hesitation Mr Balfour had accepted

this view of the situation, and then had gone on to remark that it was a pity that Laurence had no children of his own.

"You seem to understand them so much better than any of us can," he said.

"Ah, well," was the answer, "what is is, and what is not is not, and we may not alter it. But, after all, my dear fellow," and the speaker's face brightened up, "if Gertie had presented me with two or three children of my own, I might not have the time to know this little maid of yours so well."

In the seventeen years of May's life nothing had happened to shake the mutual confidence that existed between the two, no shadow had crossed their friendship, and now the tall fair-haired girl, as she recovered from her momentary surprise, held up her face to be kissed as simply and as naturally as if she were still in her nursery days.

"'Never' is a long word, sweet one," repeated Laurence, eyeing her rather anxiously.

"And two years is a long time, and so is a fortnight too, if it comes to that. Where have you been all this time?"

"Away on business for some days, or too busy to move out on others. But tell me, May, why you are sitting alone singing dirges to yourself, and why you have been crying?"

"I wasn't crying,"—and in another instant, with the indignant contradiction still fresh on her lips, the girl had buried her head on his shoulder and was sobbing her heart out.

The cause of her distress Laurence was readily able to conjecture, and if the sudden outburst of emotion took him for the moment by surprise, he had come armed at all points, amply prepared to combat May's anticipated objections to the sudden and rather startling change in the order of her daily life. For no one knew better than did Laurence Ferrier that, in the fortnight that had elapsed since he had last seen May, a certain plan had matured for sending that young lady abroad for a period of two years by way of completing her education, and that the two moving spirits in the matter from the first had been his own wife and Mr Balfour's family doctor. The

former, a wise little woman in her generation, so far from resenting her husband's affection for May, whom she laughingly declared was destined some day to be her own successor, had in her womanly way taken a deep and kindly interest in the wellbeing of her husband's favourite, treating her from the first rather as a younger sister than a friend. Latterly, there having occurred to her mind certain small circumstances which men are not in the habit of noticing, Mrs Ferrier had made representations and suggestions both to her husband and Mr Balfour, which the doctor, on being invited to pronounce his opinion, had cordially indorsed. Thorough change of air and scene, plenty of outdoor exercise — rowing, riding, bathing, tennis, and so forth — and, above all, bright companions of her own age, — these were the main requirements, and the desirability—nay, even the vital necessity—of these Laurence, so soon as the girl was sufficiently composed to listen, now proceeded to advocate, painting in glowing terms the charms of the Mesdemoiselles Carron, the beauties of the Château Marguerite overlooking the Valley d'Arc, and the general brightness of May's future surroundings.

"Why, Mr Ferrier, you talk of the place as if you had lived there all your life."

"Well, you see"—and Laurence smiled—"as I spent most of last week there, and vastly enjoyed myself, I ought to know something about it; and I also spent a month in the neighbourhood many years ago in the summer, and thought it perfectly delightful."

May opened her eyes in some surprise at having discovered that the business which had taken Laurence out of London while the law-courts were in full swing had been so intimately connected with herself.

"How could you manage to spare the time? It was very kind of you," and after a momentary hesitation, "very like you. You always are too good to me."

"Very well, then, listen," replied Laurence, accepting the compliment in all good faith as a valuable string to be played

upon. "As to my time, it is my own, and you are heartily welcome to your share of it. I am not only the senior partner in my firm, but I made the firm, and my two excellent partners, whom, mind you, I converted from clerks to partners, are not only perfectly capable of carrying on the business by themselves, but also understand that when I want a holiday I simply say that I am going to be away for so many days. So much for that. Then I knew the elder Mademoiselle Carron to be a very superior woman, for the simple reason that she was Gertie's governess for four years. The father, M. Carron, I also knew, as he spent a fortnight in our house with his daughter after our marriage, and I found him a very charming specimen of a French gentleman of the old school. The younger sister's acquaintance I only made last week, but from what I saw I made up my mind that she was in every way worthy of such a father and such a sister. But I also wanted to make acquaintance with the seven young ladies who will be your future companions, and I found them, as I hoped and expected from what I had heard, bright, sensible, and unaffected girls. So there you see, Miss May, that I have taken some trouble on your account; and in return I am simply going to ask you to take a cheerful and sensible view of what is not a very formidable situation after all, and—well, in fact, not to sing any more dirges. Now promise me that."

There was a tone of submission in May's voice as she gave the required promise.

"May I ask you one or two questions, please, now that I have promised to be quite good?"

"One or two you may, but I won't undertake to answer through a lengthy cross-examination."

"Why am I going? If I ask my father, he always says, 'Well, dear, there are reasons,' and then goes on to talk about something quite different, and that means that he doesn't really know why I am going. And if I ask old Anna, she always says it's a sin and a shame, and——"

"Then I advise you not to ask her again," interrupted

Laurence, "it's only waste of time. Now I'll tell you why you are going. You may or may not understand that man is by nature a social being—that is the one sensible thing, by the way, they ever taught me at Oxford; anyhow, we are not meant to live in little grooves of our own, and if a boy or a girl is brought up in one little groove, the result is that he or she becomes a very narrow-minded and therefore supremely uninteresting individual. Now you, my sweet May, have so far been kept in an infinitesimally narrow groove, and it is high time that you were taken out of it. You want your ideas expanding, your sympathies arousing, you want bright companions."

"I have got you and Gertie, and my father, and——" here she came to a dead stop.

"Oh, please, go on now that you have interrupted me, or shall I go on for you—and who? Old Anna? And perhaps some half-dozen others, as many people, shall we say, as you can count on the fingers of both hands—and now let us sum them up: two old fogies, your father and myself, a married woman, with some good points, we will say, as she happens to be my wife, but still old enough to be your mother."

"She isn't," interpolated May indignantly.

"Well, nearly old enough, we will say, and an obstinate old woman of the lower orders."

"Now, please, leave old Anna alone; I like her, if you don't, Mr Ferrier."

"Good! you've got the bump of loyalty at all events, my dear. But seriously, sweet May, the matter resolves itself into the fact that of the thousand million people who inhabit the globe you know perhaps ten individuals or thereabouts. And it is not at all desirable that you or any other girl should grow up with so very narrow an acquaintanceship."

"I wonder how other girls grow up;" and May's brows knitted as she began to run over in her own mind the manners and customs of the very few girls of her acquaintance.

"That our sons may grow up as the young plants: and

that our daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple."

"But I don't want to be that at all, thank you," exclaimed May, with a hearty burst of laughter as she overheard the quotation which her companion, his thoughts for the moment busy upon other matters, had half unconsciously muttered to himself.

"No, of course not, it's the corners we want to get rid of," assented Laurence, awaking from his momentary reverie. "But look here, May, now that you are going to be a sensible person on your own account, listen to a plan I have been thinking of for your father."

And the two were busily discussing, and wholly engrossed with, the new idea of a rectory in the country for Mr Balfour when that gentleman himself opened the door. The deep lines on the face of the grey-haired clergyman, who held out his hand to greet his visitor, told the true tale that he had fought life's battle hardly, and that the iron of grief and disappointment had entered deeply into his soul. Fortune had alternately smiled and frowned at him. Thirty years ago Balfour of Corpus, the man who in addition to having taken what was reported to be the best first of the year had twice stroked the winning crew from Putney to Mortlake, was spoken of as the most likely candidate for the vacant fellowship of his own College. Then a dark rumour reached the Common-room that he had no intention of standing, and a gentleman who filled the office of Senior Classical Tutor and Greats Lecturer was deputed to test the accuracy of the report, and to intimate to the young man that the College would regard his candidature with favourable eyes.

"You are a student of Dickens, I believe, Mr Balfour?" remarked the Tutor by way of opening the interview.

"Well, yes, I am—indeed I always consider that Dickens had a better knowledge of human nature than either of our friends Aristotle or Plato."

"Oh, indeed," said the Tutor drily. He was not at the

moment inclined to contradict such rash heresy; but whereas, having been in harness for many years, he had been previously debating in his own mind whether it would not be desirable to hand over some of the Greats work to Mr Balfour, he now rapidly made up his mind that such a course of action would at present be wholly undesirable.

"Have you made up your mind as to whether you mean to stand for our fellowship?"

"I don't quite see the connection, sir," replied the other, unwilling to meet what sounded like a kindly inquiry with a flat negation.

"Ah, well, no, perhaps not. But I—that is, the College—meant to remark that 'Barkis is willing,' that is all."

There could be no doubt as to who was intended to play the part of Peggotty. But now the younger man, desiring to be polite, but anxious that there should be no misunderstanding, frankly admitted that his intentions lay rather in the line of studying mankind from Dickens's point of view.

"As how, Mr Balfour?"

"As a parish priest in the East End of London, sir."

"But have you really no higher ambition than that, Mr Balfour?" inquired the Tutor. "There are so many passmen."

Of the last remark Balfour took absolutely no notice; the question he answered by saying that he had once entertained some idea of working as a foreign missionary, but that family reasons dictated Church work nearer home. And the Tutor went back to the Common-room with the startling intelligence that the young man he had been appointed to interview had a screw loose somewhere.

"Sound enough, you know, so far as the reasoning faculty is concerned, in fact clear-headed on most points, but one of those queer religious enthusiasts. He will be much more at home in the streets of London than in our Common-room."

Religious enthusiast or not, the man Balfour brought so much practical energy and power of organisation to bear upon

his new work that his Bishop, ever on the watch for new blood, and ever ready to reward merit by promotion, shortly appointed him to a not unimportant living with a hint of better things to come. Matrimony followed in due course, and at five-and-thirty Lionel Balfour, blessed by the companionship of a sweet-natured and sympathetic woman, and conscious of the growth of spiritual life in his parish, could look round with satisfaction on the results of the work of his hands, and so was entitled to esteem himself a happy man. But alas for the transitory nature of worldly prosperity! Within twelve months the first blow came in the loss of the young wife: a few years later the power of work was for many a long day suspended, and the salt was gone from the man's life.

Only gradually, as has been said, had the child won her way into her father's heart, and only within the last few months had there been an entire cessation of the grave symptoms that had caused the great doctor to put a veto on the growing desire to pick up the threads of the past working life. Even now it was more from the feeling that he should be ill requiting Laurence Ferrier's consistent friendship by a refusal, than from any inclination or feeling of aptitude for the more limited sphere of work which he foresaw in a quiet country parish, that he finally lent a favourable hearing to his friend's proposal to submit his name to Lord Leuchars.

"It is hardly to be called work at all," he argued; "it sounds much more like living in the lap of luxury."

"Well, then, go and live in the lap of luxury, my good man, and see how you like it," was the ready retort. "You are not so young as you were, Balfour, any more than I am, and I cannot work as I did twenty years ago. Besides, you have to think what manner of home you will have to offer to May when she comes back, and we know that life in a London suburb is not what would be recommended for her.

Prince Charming will come one of these fine days, and then you will only have yourself to consider. Now, may I run down and see Leuchars and tell him that the matter is settled?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so," replied Mr Balfour, rather reluctantly; and with that Laurence took his leave, fairly well satisfied with the results of his lengthy visit.

CHAPTER VI.

A MISADVENTURE.

The shooting of the Mote coverts had been arranged for a Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. The Saturday of each week Lord Leuchars devoted to County Council business, an arrangement which thoroughly coincided with John Fox's ideas of sporting necessities.

"They Jews," remarked that worthy man, who salved his conscience on the matter of not going to church on Sundays by a diligent study of the Bible, more particularly favouring the Old Testament, as containing the history of Nimrod, Esau, and other sporting characters, "they picked up their extra grub of a Saturday, and so I holds to going round the coverts and picking up the cripples, as is downright shameful to leave fretting and starving over Sunday."

And it so happened that on his way to the station on the Saturday prior to the important week, his lordship, remembering that he had forgotten to send certain instructions to John Fox, and meeting young Dick Loder on his bicycle, charged him with the delivery of a message.

"You won't forget, my boy," he said, "and try to see Fox yourself: he is generally at home between four and five. And if you don't happen to catch him, put it down on paper, like a good fellow. The old woman is a good soul in her way, but she has about as much memory as a cucumber."

In pursuance of these directions Dick mounted his bicycle late in the afternoon, and was leisurely making his way in the direction of the keeper's house when he was suddenly hailed by a tall and well-set-up young man in a workman's dress.

"Happen as you can spare a minute, Master Dick?"

The speaker was an old acquaintance, one Harry Stokes, who had, a few years back, married a pretty housemaid from Loders. He was a civil and obliging fellow, a man who, under ordinary circumstances, earned good wages in the ironstone-works, but it was easy to see from the drawn and haggard look on his face that he had for some reason or another fallen upon bad times.

"Well, Harry, what is it?" exclaimed Dick as he dismounted. "Hulloa, man!" as he caught a full view of his face, "what is wrong with you? You look half-starved. What have you been up to?"

"Up to nothing, and not much to eat, that's about what is the matter, Master Dick. No," as he saw Dick's hand at once going to his pocket, "I ain't quite come to that yet—I ain't done no begging so far, and, what's more, I shan't. But thank you all the same, sir. But what I were agoing to ask you were just this, if as how you should happen to run up against Mr Fox——"

"I'm on my way to see him now," struck in Dick.

"Well then, sir, they do say as how his lordship's coverts are agoing to be shot next week, and I were thinking if you was to put in a word for me so as Master Fox should give me a job a-beating, I'd earn a few shillings mebbe, and take it kindly of you, Master Dick."

Dick readily consented to act as intercessor with the all-important Fox; then it occurred to him to inquire into the cause of his companion's state of comparative destitution. The men in the employ of the ironstone company were as a rule reckoned to be better off than the ordinary farm-labourers, and Dick had an idea that if Stokes had lost his place, and was permanently out of work, there would be no great

difficulty in finding work for a capable man either in the garden at Loders or elsewhere in the village.

"Tell me what has gone wrong with you, Harry? Had a row with your manager or what?"

"Just a turn of downright bad luck, Master Dick, and that's the long and short of it. Six weeks back I had a bit of a fall off a plank and sprained my ankle, and couldn't go to work the best part of a fortnight. Well, that were right enough —I goes on my club and gets fifteen shillings a-week. And then, just as I gets off the books, in comes that beggarly frost, and there ain't been not a stroke of work done up at the works for wellnigh a month. It's the first winter as there's been a frost same as we've had now ever since I took on with that ironstone job. And now I wish as I were shot on it altogether. It's all very well to say as we earns one-and-twenty or mebbe two-and-twenty shilling a-week when the works is open, but you go and stop a chap working for a month or more with four mouths as well as his own to feed, and his wife laid by in August with a doctor's bill as eats up all his savings, and where are you then, Master Dick?"

Notwithstanding the slight confusion of persons, there was so much truth and common-sense in the man's argument that Dick felt unfeignedly sorry for him, and presently found himself wondering what sort of figure he should make himself if he was called upon to limit his own expenses—let alone the matter of wife and children—to some £60 or £70 a-year. He remembered that he had spent somewhere about that amount without any difficulty in the course of a single term at Oxford.

"It is a bit rough, Harry, on the kids and Annie," he remarked; "but couldn't you pick up a job anywhere? There is Fox, for instance, he must have wanted an extra hand or two at this time of year."

"Catch me going agin Master Fox myself," was the answer: "that is why I made so bold as to ask you to say a word for me, Master Dick. Now I ain't agoing to say a word agin

John Fox, as does his work better nor most folk. But he've gotten his knife into us ironstone folk, and it's not a mossel of use for any one of us chaps to ask Master Fox for a day's work. And there's no saying that one or two chaps as goes up to ironstone don't now and again pick up a hare or a rabbit if he gets a chance—not as I've ever done it myself, as I wouldn't touch fur or feather of his lordship's. But that's where ye are, Master Dick."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Harry," said Dick, after a moment's reflection, "I'll go straight along now and catch Fox at home if I can, and if you will be somewhere handy near his house, we'll see what is to be done,"—and, jumping on to his bicycle, in another five minutes Dick had reached the gamekeeper's home.

On the whole the Fates were propitious. John Fox had just returned home after feeding his pheasants, and as the birds had shown up well at the feed, the old man was in an unusually benignant frame of mind, which augured well for the success of Dick's mission.

"And what do you think of his lordship's guns for next week, Fox?" inquired Dick, as, after delivering Lord Leuchars' message, he stood talking to the keeper by the garden gate.

"Well, I won't say as some of them can't shoot a bit, Master Dick, and I won't say as all of them can. There's Squire Silcock, there's some days as he can't hit an 'ay-rick, and then now and again he'll fetch them down as well as his lordship or yourself or any of them. It's my belief as he eats too much. A stummick as is overfull don't give good shooting, Master Dick. And there's that young Mister Treherne, Mr Bertie as his lordship calls him. Well, he ain't what you would call a good shot, not a patch on his brother, Squire Treherne, as is the best shot I ever did see. But Mr Bertie, he's very well pleased with himself, and we're always very pleased with him, his lordship and all. I always says as his lordship—he never enjoys a day's shooting like as when Mr Bertie is there

a-talking and a-laughing, and his lordship a-scolding of him. And then there's Mister Chevely as is coming," and as if Mr Chevely's name had left a disagreeable taste in his mouth, the old keeper pulled up short and made a comically wry face.

"He is a very good shot, isn't he?" inquired Dick.

"Well, I won't say as he don't shoot as well as here a one and there a one. But I don't like him, Master Dick, and what's more, I don't count as his lordship do either. He've got a red-hot head and a red-hot temper into the bargain, and he shows the one just as much as he shows the t'other, and—well then, I just don't like him."

"And how about your beaters — got plenty?" now inquired Dick, as he caught sight of his friend Stokes in the distance.

"They'll be there when they're wanted, Master Dick," and rightly implying from this enigmatical answer that there were still vacancies in the ranks to be filled, Dick brought forward Harry Stokes's name, and putting it in the light of a personal favour to himself, so worked upon the keeper's feelings that he did something more than merely carry his point. For Stokes was presently invited to join the conference, and informed that his services would be required not for three days only but for the whole of the following week.

"They as beats the three days most in general has a couple of rabbits at the end," remarked the keeper as he noted with approval the eager look of gratitude on the man's face, and therefrom inferred that food had been hard to come by; "and as I've got a couple handy in the house, you might as well carry 'em home with you now, my lad. I reckons you knows as well as I do who you've gotten to thank over this job."

"We all on us knows Master Dick," replied Harry, and two minutes later he was tramping homeward with a choking sensation in his throat and a pair of rabbits in his hand.

And being in due course overtaken by Dick, he experienced yet another benefaction of fortune. For that young man having bethought himself that there might be a scarcity of

other things beside butcher's meat in the Stokes household, and having evolved a plan whereby he felt that he could relieve the present necessity without wounding the man's sense of independence, hailed him.

"I say, Harry, hold my bike for a minute while I light the lamp—there's a good fellow."

Having lighted the lamp, Dick then proceeded to fill and light a pipe also.

"You might as well carry my cartridges for me next week while you are about it, Harry," he remarked, as he prepared to remount.

"I'll do that in welcome, sir."

"Ah, yes, but that is a paid job. Let me see, three days, isn't it? There," and on the instant he pushed three half-crowns into Harry's unwilling hand, and without waiting to be thanked jumped into the saddle, and shouting a cheery "good night," went on his way rejoicing.

Half a mile farther on, having to pass a place where the road leading from the Mote Park gates turns a corner sharply, and then running down a slight incline enters the main road, Dick, fancying that he saw the glimmer of another bicycle lamp coming round the corner, had only just had time to ring his warning bell, slowing down as he did so, when receiving amidship the sudden and full shock of a machine ridden at top speed, he was hurled with crashing violence on to a heap of stones with two bicycles and a heavy man on top of him. The aggressor, as is generally the case in an accident of the kind, escaped almost scatheless, avoiding in all probability a serious accident on his own account by the simple process of providing himself with something comparatively soft, Dick Loder's body to wit, to fall upon. A considerable shaking, a slight cut on the head, and a bruise on one knee, comprised the full extent of his own personal damages. To rise from the kneeling position in which he found himself, and to remove his machine from the top of the wreck he had created, to stoop over the body of the man who was lying motionless, and to

attempt by the dim light to ascertain the nature and extent of the injuries, was the work of a moment.

"Good heavens! I believe I've killed him!"

But at that moment a feeling of intense relief succeeded. For Dick Loder had opened his eyes, something like a smile had struggled to his lips, and a faint voice whispered, "I like it," after which astounding statement the speaker relapsed into unconsciousness.

"The devil you do, my fine fellow!" involuntarily exclaimed the other; "well, I can't say that I like it myself. I don't think that I ever liked anything less in the whole of my life. What an egregious fool you have made of yourself to-night, my good Laurence Ferrier! Here you are on a strange road, night coming on, a man badly smashed, and how badly smashed you don't know, and no one to blame for it but yourself, and—well, yes, and the fool of a country post going out at an unconscionable hour." And having thus rapidly summed up the situation, Laurence set himself seriously to work to amend matters. Passing his hands tenderly and cautiously over Dick's body, he made the discovery that the latter's right arm was broken, and this at once provoked a fresh outburst of self-recrimination.

"What's the good of a man in a case like this? Now, if Gertie had been here with her head full of first aids to the wounded, or last aids to the dying, or whatever they call it, there would have been some sense in it. Moral, Never go to a strange land without taking your wife with you, or else send her to the office and attend the ambulance classes yourself. That is, if you mean to smash up a fellow on the road: not that I wouldn't have given—— Hulloa! what's that? hi! you there, hi!" For at the very moment Laurence was going to acquit himself of malice of forethought, the welcome sound of approaching footsteps fell on his ear.

"Hi! hi!" came the cheery answer, and in another moment a new actor in the person of Harry Stokes appeared on the scene.

"Hulloa! what's up?" exclaimed the new-comer, as Laurence rose to his feet. "Who have ye gotten there? What! Master Dick," with howl of mingled grief and wrath. "Dead, and you done it? D—n you!" and he turned furiously on Laurence with clenched fists and an ugly look on his face.

The hostile demonstration, coming thus suddenly in the way of a diversion, rather amused than alarmed Laurence Ferrier. A complete master of the art of self-defence, he had twenty years ago been as awkward a customer to tackle with the gloves as any amateur in London, and even now was perfectly able to take care of himself in the matter of fisticuffs with a rustic of Harry Stokes's calibre. Feeling, however, that he was urgently in need of the man's assistance, he adopted a conciliatory policy.

"Come, come, my good friend, don't make a fool of yourself. There's enough mischief done already in all conscience' sake. Your friend, Master Dick you call him, is no more dead than I am, and, please Heaven, he'll live to make old bones yet. What?" as Harry muttered something; "it was I who did it —of course I did it; don't suppose that I don't know that much already, and, what is more, let me tell you that I'd give a good deal to be lying there in his place, and he standing in my shoes at this minute."

The quiet earnestness with which he spoke carried conviction to Harry's doubting mind, and brought the latter to his bearings at once. Moreover, he had now grasped the idea that the speaker was a gentleman, and could see in the fast-fading light that he was a man of a certain age.

"Beg your pardon, sir; I'm sorry if I spoke rough-like, but I was that put about when I saw as it were Master Dick: then he ain't dead, sir?"

"Dead! no; I tell you he'll make old bones yet," and Laurence gave an involuntary shudder as he felt that, after all, he was saying what he hoped rather than knew to be the case. "But come now, you are going to be a good sensible fellow and help me. It's Master Dick, is it? Master Dick what?"

"Loder, sir, son of the old Squire, lives two miles off."

"Good—and the Mote is a mile or so off?"

"Thereabouts, sir."

"Very well, then. Now, my friend—what is your own name, by the way? Oh, Stokes, is it? Well then, Stokes, can you ride a bicycle?"

"I rides one to my work now and again."

"Well, then, you can ride one now, if needs be. Stop a minute though, let us see if the animal is in working order," and he rapidly tested the pedals, tyres, and general mechanism of his machine. "That's all right," he went on as he concluded his inspection, "and the lamp isn't smashed either,—bent a bit, but it will do. Got a match about you? That's right. Hulloa! what's that you've put down? Rabbits, eh? Been doing a bit of poaching, Mr Stokes? No affair of mine, you know."

"The keeper gave them me half an hour back. That were along of Master Dick too."

"Good again. And now that we've got the lamp lit, let's have another good look at him and see what harm is done. Ah!" as he again knelt by Dick's side, "coming to again," for Dick had opened his eyes, and was staring straight into the speaker's face with the dazed look of returning consciousness. "Please don't move, my dear fellow, and don't try to speak or help yourself in any way. You have had a bad accident, and we are going to try and mend you. Now, Stokes, lend a hand, and we will try to put Mr Loder in a more comfortable position."

And in a few minutes Dick was duly disentangled from the wreckage of his broken bicycle, and put in a reclining attitude on the grass by the roadside with his back against the stones, and his head resting on an extemporised pillow consisting of the rabbits covered by Ferrier's silk pocket-handkerchief. Notwithstanding that he had been handled as tenderly as possible under the circumstances, Dick, who in addition to the broken arm was bruised from head to foot all down

one side of the body, groaned heavily more than once during the moving operation; but when at the conclusion of it he seemed to have relapsed into a state of unconsciousness, Ferrier at once decided in his own mind that there had been no inconsiderable concussion of the brain. This only made him the more anxious to secure medical assistance without further loss of time.

"Look here, my man," he said, addressing Stokes, "one of us will have to get on that bicycle and get hold of a conveyance to take Mr Loder home, and then fetch a doctor to him straight off. Now where shall we get a doctor quickest?"

"Westhampton, three miles or more t'other side of Mote."

"Well, you know the country better than I do, so do you go to the Mote stables and give that," and he handed him a card on which he had hastily scribbled a few words, "to the coachman, or some one with a head on his shoulders. Tell whoever you see what has happened, and see that they don't send a high dog-cart, or anything of that sort, and mind there are plenty of wraps and so forth. Then go straight on to Westhampton, and catch a doctor—none of your messages, mind; see the doctor yourself and tell him it is a bad case. Give him this card, and tell him I will meet him at Mr Loder's house. And here, take this for your trouble."

"I'll go in welcome, sir. But I ain't agoing to take that," answered Harry, as Laurence offered him a sovereign. "I ain't earned it."

"Rubbish, man. I'm a lawyer, I tell you, and I never give a man a brief without a retaining fee. There will be a freshener to come later on, if you do as I tell you. And, by the way, as you are going to ride and I have got to sit still, just put your coat over this poor fellow's legs. I don't particularly fancy sitting here in my shirt-sleeves."

Harry, with a grin, divested himself of his coat with much more alacrity than he had displayed in accepting the sovereign.

"We don't make much count on lawyers down in these parts," he remarked, "but I reckon you're a different sort of lawyer to some on 'em. What be I to do with the machine, sir?"

"Throw it in the ditch if you like," exclaimed Laurence in a momentary fit of irritation, as it occurred to him that if he had left his bicycle in London the accident would never have happened. "No, don't do that though. Leave it at the stables on your way back, and either wait there yourself or walk on the road to meet us. I shall come back in the carriage if all is well, and then I can refund your coat and your rabbits and hand over that freshener."

For all that Harry knew to the contrary a freshener might have been an edible commodity, but without waiting to make any further inquiry, he mounted his bicycle and made such good use of his time that, in less than half an hour, a Victoria from the Mote, driven by the head-coachman himself with a sturdy groom in attendance, reached the scene of the disaster. Furthermore he had the good fortune to run a doctor to ground at the first attempt, so that within two hours of his leaving the keeper's house Dick Loder found himself lying in his own bed with his arm in splints, with a sorely bruised and shaken body, and a very hazy idea of the thing that had befallen him.

"Simple fracture of the forearm, one rib broken, a pretty considerable bruising, and slight concussion of the brain. Nothing to be uneasy about, my dear sir."

Laurence Ferrier groaned in spirit as the young doctor delivered his verdict with the cheerful air of a man who finds that, contrary to his expectations, he will after a long day's work get home to the comfortable dinner that awaits him.

"You will——" and he whispered a few words to the doctor, who after a momentary hesitation replied—

"Oh, well, yes, if you particularly wish it, Mr eh—eh, oh yes—I see, Ferrier. It's not exactly usual, but to be sure the

circumstances are not exactly usual either. I don't suppose that Mr Loder will ever notice it after all. And now if you will take my advice, my dear sir, it would be almost advisable that you should not see Mr Loder to-night. His train"—and he consulted his watch—"will hardly be at Westhampton yet, and to tell you the truth, the old gentleman is rather excitable, and—well, yes, I have known him to be not exactly polite on occasions. He says things that he doesn't mean exactly—in fact," lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "he swears like the devil."

"Thank you," answered Laurence with a grim smile. "I am afraid that a little swearing under the circumstances might be justifiable. Would it be troubling you, by the way, if I asked you to post this letter for me in Westhampton? I was on my way to the village to post it when we came to grief. Good night and thank you."

On the way back to the Mote the carriage was hailed by Stokes, and Laurence jumped out to have a word with him.

"Here is your coat, and here are your rabbits, my good fellow, and here is your freshener, with many thanks for your timely help. You will be glad to hear that Mr Loder is comfortable in bed now, and we'll hope that he will soon be about again."

"I be main glad to hear that, sir. But I'd as lieve not take that all the same. I've been paid over and over again for to-night's job already."

"Ah, but you don't understand law, my friend; the first was only the retaining fee, so put that in your pocket and shake hands."

"I don't know as I do much about law, sir, but I knows a gentleman when I meets him. Good night, sir, and thank you kindly," and heartily shaking Ferrier's hand, Harry Stokes put on his coat and walked home to gladden his wife and family with the story of his unexpected windfall.

It may be imagined that the evening's adventure formed the

staple subject of conversation at the Mote dinner-table that night, and that Lord Leuchars was rather taken aback on hearing how his guest had spent the few hours that had elapsed since his arrival at the house.

"I say, Master Lorrie," he suddenly remarked, just after the servants had left the dining-room, "do you know that in smashing up young Dick Loder you have damaged a very important member of my shooting-party for next week?"

Laurence duly expressed his contrition, and Lady Leuchars was heard to murmur something to the effect that under the circumstances it was almost a pity that it was not the other brother.

"How very kind of you, mother dear!" exclaimed Betty; "you always are so very charitable about Graham. If it had to be one of the family at all, I would much rather it had been Mr Loder himself."

Laurence Ferrier smiled. He had not been ten minutes in the house without discovering that Lady Leuchars and her daughter agreed to differ on points many and various.

"Charity makes a distinction of persons, I see, Lady Betty. But I have evidently done the wrong thing in disabling the shooting member of the family."

"You will have to take his place yourself," remarked Betty, "or we shall have my father tearing his hair up by the roots. It is a sort of national calamity to lose a shooting man."

Before Ferrier could make any reply Lord Leuchars warmly seconded Betty's suggestion.

"Upon my honour, Lorrie, Betty has hit the mark first shot. You are the very man I want. I know that you used to hold your gun straight in old days, and I think I may promise you some fairly good sport; so write off for your gun and more clothes and make a week of it."

"You are very kind," said Ferrier, hesitating as to how far he was justified in availing himself of the hospitable offer, which he was loth to refuse entirely, more because he felt that a few days at the Mote might give him an opportunity

of making the better acquaintance of the young man whom he had involuntarily injured than from any other feeling; "but I cannot quite do what you suggest, and I don't imagine that I shall make a very efficient substitute for Mr Loder. Will you let me take half the cake? I must get up to London on Monday, but I could run down again. What days do you shoot?"

"Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday."

"Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday?" repeated Laurence. "I'm afraid I could hardly manage three days. Would it be upsetting your arrangements too much if I offered to come for the last two days?"

And as Lord Leuchars after a short reflection decided that seven guns would probably be capable of doing justice to some of the smaller coverts, it was eventually arranged to the satisfaction of all parties that Ferrier should return to the Mote in time for dinner on the Wednesday night, and shoot on the two following days.

On the Sunday afternoon Laurence, making his way across the fields to Loders in order to inquire how the patient then was progressing, overtook Harry Stokes bound on a similar errand. As the two men had only met in the uncertain light of the previous evening, it was not until Ferrier inquired whether he was on the right road for Loders that Stokes recognised him by his voice.

"Yes, sir, that's right enough. But aren't you the gentleman as I met last night, and was you going to see Mr Dick, if I might make so bold as to ask?"

"Right you are, my friend," replied Laurence; "I had my idea that you were my good Samaritan. Were you on your way to see Mr Dick too?"

For the moment Stokes looked rather sheepish.

"I had had a mind that way, sir, but"—and gathering courage as he went on, he now proposed that Ferrier should act as his intermediary, having perhaps more confidence that his message would be more correctly delivered by the latter

than by a servant,—"if you was agoing, sir, happen as you'd give this to Mr Dick and say as I sent it."

"Hulloa! what's the meaning of this?" exclaimed Ferrier, looking at the three half-crowns that had been thrust into his hand. "What is it, my man? a debt, or a fee, or a present, or what?"

"Well, it ain't exactly one nor t'other as I knows on, but it was Mr Dick as gave it me," and Stokes proceeded to enlighten the lawyer as to the circumstances under which the money had been given. "And it were Mr Dick as gotten me the beating job and all," he concluded.

Two things at once appealed to Ferrier in a favourable light —the sturdy honesty of the man in refunding the money on the ground that it had only been advanced in repayment for services that could not now be rendered, and the kindly forethought in the donor, who had disguised his charity in a garb that commended itself to the recipient, without wounding his spirit of independence.

"I'll hand it on to the owner," he remarked as he pocketed the coins; "but as I have by my awkwardness deprived you of one job, it is only fair that I should give you another. So as I am going to take Mr Dick's place, and shoot with his lordship, perhaps you will carry my cartridges instead. It will be only for the last two days, but we'll make that all right," and cutting short the other's protestations of gratitude, Laurence walked sharply on, and in another ten minutes found himself at Loders.

"Mr Dick is in bed, sir," said the butler, who readily recognised the lawyer; "but I'll go and see if he would like to see you. Or would you see the Squire himself, sir?"

The latter suggestion Laurence had no hesitation about declining. On the way to church in the morning he had sounded Betty, who had walked with him, as to the history of the Loder family, and the young lady's account of the head of the house had not predisposed him in the latter gentleman's favour.

"If he is rude to my father, he will be rude to any one," she had observed, and Ferrier had entirely agreed with her.

But Fortune, which is reputed to favour the brave, did not extend the same kindness to our visitor; for it so happened that the servant with Ferrier's card in his hand encountered the Squire himself coming down the stairs.

"Laurence Ferrier, Carlton Club," exclaimed the Squire as he studied the card, which he had at once appropriated. "Who the devil is he, and what does he want, and where does he come from?"

All these questions the butler answered to the best of his ability, wisely suppressing the fact that Laurence was in any way connected with Dick's misadventure.

"I think he is staying at the Mote, sir, and he called to inquire after Mr Dick."

"Oh, then you can go and tell him—no, I'll go and see him myself."

His introductory address to Laurence, whom he found standing just inside the front door, if it verified the accuracy of Betty's descriptions, could hardly be called encouraging.

"You have come from the Mote to see my boy Dick, I hear. Well, I don't think you can see him. Some blundering swine smashed him up on a bicycle last night, and he is in bed."

Accustomed to deal with all sorts and conditions of men, Laurence answered with perfect composure—

"The blundering swine thought it was only part of his duty to call and express his extreme regret for the accident for which he was so unfortunately responsible."

The quiet manner in which the speaker at once adopted his own description of the offender for the moment took the Squire aback, and he now only stared at Laurence with the uncertain air of a bull which hesitates between attacking and retreating. As the brute beast is brought to its bearings by the unflinching gaze of mankind, so now the human animal encountering the steady eyes and calm bearing of Laurence Ferrier elected to assume a more conciliatory attitude.

"Well," with a rough laugh, "I suppose accidents will happen sometimes."

"Occasionally, I am afraid, when people are so criminally careless as I was."

"Hum, well, least said soonest mended, don't they say?" responded the Squire, with a rude attempt at jocularity; and then by way of dismissing a slightly awkward subject he suddenly inquired if Ferrier thought that the winter favourite was likely to win the Derby.

The person to whom the question was put had not the most remote idea what was the winter favourite, so that the amount of information he could give was not likely to be very valuable. But as it occurred to him that a little diplomatic humouring of his host's fancy was likely to further the object of his visit, he now drew a bow at a venture.

"Not a very good name for a Derby horse, is it?"

"No, a d—d bad one," cordially asserted the Squire; "but what's in a name after all?"

"Well, not much perhaps," said Laurence, feeling no wiser than before.

Fortunately at this juncture there flashed across his mind the recollection that only a few days before he had heard two men discussing turf matters at the Club, and one of them, whose opinion was reputed to be worth having, had made a remark which Laurence now reproduced almost in the original form.

"That is a nice little horse of the Prince's. I don't say that it will quite win, but it will be there or thereabouts. It is bred for staying."

The Squire pricked up his ears.

"By George! I think you are right, sir. Let me see—it is by—ah, what is it by? I seem to know, but I can't put a name to it."

For the moment Laurence felt nonplussed. That the Prince had a horse in the Derby he was certain, as he had heard the man in the Club say so; but as he did not know the creature's name, he was hardly likely to know its parentage. So he wisely

took refuge in generalities, trusting that his host would not cross-examine him too severely.

"Oh, it is by—eh—what is the animal's name? Anyhow, there are two crosses of the old Blacklock blood, and that ought to be good enough."

"To be sure, yes," responded the Squire; "I am very much obliged to you, sir. If you don't mind, I will just make a note of it."

"Do, by all means," said Laurence, infinitely relieved; "but I don't think I should back it just yet, you know."

"Perhaps not," and infinitely to his visitor's relief the Squire again changed the subject, suggesting that Laurence might like something after his walk.

"I won't drink anything, thank you very much all the same. Tea is my only afternoon beverage. But do you think I might see your son and offer my apologies in person?"

"Well, I don't suppose there would be much harm in it. To be sure the doctor did say something about his being kept quiet. But then all doctors are d—d fools, I say."

If Laurence did not entirely indorse this statement, it was certainly impolitic to argue the point to his own disadvantage; and as the Squire was pleased to interpret an inaudible reply as consenting to his proposition, he now rang the bell and ordered the butler to knock at Dick's door and find out if he was awake.

"Tell him, if he is awake, that a gentleman would like to see him."

The process of knocking at a person's door to find out if he is awake has seldom been known to fail in the long-run, so that the butler presently reappeared with the intelligence that Mr Dick would be delighted to see the gentleman, and Laurence was ushered upstairs to find a very pale and shattered-looking individual lying on his back, and blinking violently at the sudden admission of light into his hitherto darkened room.

"Now please don't trouble to move, my dear fellow," said

Laurence as he seated himself on a convenient chair by the bedside. "It was selfish of me to disturb you, but I did not like to go away without telling you how deeply grieved I am that you should be suffering so much from my carelessness."

Dick smiled faintly, and made half a movement to stretch out his uninjured hand to his visitor; but on the moment a twinge of pain crossed his face, and he desisted from the effort.

"Please don't worry about it. I daresay it was quite as much my fault as yours. It is lucky we did not both come to grief." Laurence shook his head emphatically.

"It is very nice of you to say so, Mr Loder; but I did deserve to get my neck or at any rate my arm broken, and you deserved nothing of the kind. My only excuse is that I don't know the roads, and had no idea that there was another corner coming. But that won't mend matters or your arm either. Is it paining you very much?"

"It aches a bit on and off, and I am a bit achy all over, but please don't say anything more about it. It was very kind of you to look after me as you did. You might have ridden off and left me lying there. I don't mean that *you* might," smiling, "but some fellows do that sort of thing."

"Thanks," replied Laurence, returning the smile, "I have not come quite to that point yet. I am sorry to hear, by the way, that I have deprived you of your sport next week. I am charged with all sorts of messages from the Mote. Let me see—his lordship sent you his love, and said that he hoped you would come out and lunch with us any day or every day of the shooting, and Lady Betty sent you her love, and Lady Leuchars——"

"Now, don't say she sent her love too, or I shan't believe the rest, Mr Ferrier," and as he caught the lawyer's eye they laughed simultaneously.

"Well, we'll say condolences without the love then," assented Ferrier.

A momentary silence was broken by Dick suddenly inquiring—

"Are you going to take my place, Mr Ferrier?—you talked about lunching with us."

"Well, I am going to shoot instead of you, though I doubt if I shall quite take your place."

"I am very glad; you will like it awfully," exclaimed Dick. "Tasker Wood is about the best shooting in the county. I have never shot there the first time through, you know. I have never been at home before, but it ought to be quite first-rate. I am so glad you are going."

The frank outburst of schoolboy enthusiasm, unalloyed by any expression of personal disappointment, impressed Laurence Ferrier more deeply than he cared to show.

"Well, Mr Loder, if you don't come to lunch that day at all events, I shall either think that you have not forgiven me or that you are too ill to come, in which case I shall have to come over and pay you a visit instead of shooting, eh?"

"I will be there right enough, if I can."

"That is a bargain then. Now one word more, Mr Loder. Have you any choice in the way of bicycles? I can't mend your arm or stop the pain—Heaven knows I wish I could," and his manner as he said this proved that there was more than ordinary amount of truth in the observation; "but the machine is even more badly smashed than the owner, and that at all events I must insist upon replacing."

"Oh no, please," was the answer; "it was a gimcrack old thing. I was just going to get a new one, so please don't bother."

"Look you here, young gentleman," said Laurence; "you must not hit a fellow who is down, and it is not fair to oppress any one with too great a weight of obligation. Mine is heavy enough already in all seriousness. So as you were going to get a new machine, I will save you the trouble and send one from my own maker. No thanks, please; that is all nonsense under the circumstances. And now here is something which I nearly forgot, three half-crowns from a Mr Stokes, money given in prepayment of services which cannot be rendered."

"Oh, but I say, poor Stokes, and he was so hard up, Mr Ferrier," exclaimed Dick in deep distress; "I do wish you had not taken it. How did he come to give it you?" and he stared hard at Ferrier, who was not a little amused to see that the thought of Stokes's impecunious condition had for the moment entirely superseded the matter of the bicycle.

"You'll do, my lad," muttered the lawyer to himself, and he next proceeded to reassure Dick.

"You need not be uneasy about Stokes; I think I may promise you that he will manage to get on for the next week or two. He did me yeoman service last night, and that put a little in his pocket; besides, he is going to carry my cartridges."

Just at this moment there was a knock at the door, and the butler appeared with the announcement that tea was waiting Mr Ferrier in the drawing-room, and that the Squire thought Mr Dick had been talking long enough.

"Quite right," said Laurence, rising from his chair. "Now, good-bye for the present, my dear fellow. I won't offer any more apologies, but if I don't see you at Tasker Wood on Thursday, I will pay you another visit, if I may. Now I am going to draw down your blind again, and hope that you will get some sleep."

And Dick was left to wonder what had induced his father to show such unwonted amiability towards the man against whom a few hours ago he had been fulminating vengeance.

In the mean time Ferrier, having been introduced to Miss Loder, found himself assailed by such a multiplicity of questions as to whether he was in any way connected with a Mr Ferrier whose great-aunt was an intimate friend of Miss Loder's grandmother, or with sundry other Ferriers who were uncles, cousins, and aunts of all sorts of people, that he shortly gave the lady her head, and when he left the house had charged himself with innumerable messages to a complete clan of imaginary relations. Furthermore he had pledged himself to inform the Squire when the proper moment had arrived

for backing the Prince's Derby candidate, salving his conscience by a few parting words of discreet warning.

"Then, if you don't hear anything, my dear sir, you may quite make up your mind that I don't know anything."

When on his return to the Mote he was asked by Betty, who had been rather surprised at the duration of his visit to Loders, what he thought of the Squire and of the family generally, he assured the young lady that every one had been most kind and hospitable.

"And you liked them all?" exclaimed Betty, opening her eyes.

"There are degrees of liking, my dear young lady," was the cautious reply; "but I may tell you that your friend Dick I liked especially, and that I have no doubt he is an out-of-the-way nice young fellow. I may be wrong, of course, but thirty years ago or more a certain learned tutor at Oxford was at pains to impress upon my memory that there were two great methods of scientific discovery, Observation and Experiment, the latter not always feasible, but when feasible, the more expeditious of the two. Now in the case of Dick Loder, I, having made a most involuntary, and to him somewhat painful experiment, have satisfied my mind that he rings true metal. Other people — your father, for instance, my dear," Lady Betty started for a moment at the epithet, but seeing a kindly twinkle in the lawyer's eye, made no comment—"using their observation, have decided that Mr Graham Loder is equally sound. And so I fancy that those who pin their confidence on either the one or the other of those two young men will not in the long-run be disappointed. Dick happens to be my choice at present, but I am open to conviction, and your father does not often make a mistake. And now I must go and do some writing."

"I like you at all events, my friend," murmured Betty to herself as he left the room, and there was something in the man's manner that told the girl that the feeling was reciprocated.

CHAPTER VII.

IN TASKER WOOD.

Dick Loder duly kept his engagement and joined the shooting-party in Tasker Wood an hour or so before luncheon-time, and presently attached himself to Laurence Ferrier, who seemed unfeignedly glad to see him.

"Rather a formidable ordeal," remarked the last-named gentleman at the conclusion of the last beat before lunch, during which he had shot very indifferently, "for a person with nerves like mine to be criticised by the best shot in the country-side. No, no," as Dick shook his head, "you need not put in a disclaimer. I got your character straight from headquarters, and that only makes me feel more ashamed of having violently annexed the place of a better man than myself. I don't say that I am not enjoying my day, but I should have enjoyed it far more if you and I could change places. Perhaps you would too, Mr Loder," he added with a smile.

"Oh dear, no," replied Dick heartily; "I am enjoying myself all right, thank you. I like looking on at shooting."

"Hem, yes, and you seemed to like being knocked silly by a blundering attorney, if I remember correctly. Do you know that the first remark you made when I came to pick you up was, 'I like it,' and then you fainted, and then—well, I really forget what you did say when you came to. But I have a dis-

tinct recollection of that 'I like it.' Queer tastes some people have!"

"Did I really say that?" said Dick, laughing. "I did not know that I said anything at all."

"Slipped out, I suppose, a natural or a characteristic ebullition, let us call it—no act of volition implied. I wonder what they would call it in a court of law, hardly to be accepted as evidence of any definite frame of mind, absence of premeditation, or malice of forethought," and Laurence kept on murmuring to himself as if pursuing a train of thought, then suddenly breaking off, turned to his companion and added very gravely, "Yes, and it will not be my fault, Mr Loder, if some day you do not have occasion to say that you like it in sober earnest. Now, come and sit next to me at lunch and I will look after your wants. I have established a prescriptive right to do that much for you at all events."

And presently Dick found himself seated between the lawyer and a particularly bright-looking fellow who looked as if he might be a year or two older than himself.

Ferrier was as good as his word, and looked after Dick's wants assiduously, so much so indeed that in spite of Dick's remonstrances he ate very little luncheon himself, until at last Lord Leuchars interfered from the head of the table.

"I say, Laurence," he shouted, "how are you and your baby getting on down there? Feeding that Dick Loder is rather like stuffing a young cormorant, isn't it? Eat something yourself, my good fellow. There, there, that's right. Good boy, Bertie."

For at this moment Dick's other neighbour, who had been keeping the table in roars of laughter by a description of his own share in the morning's sport, suddenly appropriated Dick's plate and began cutting up some cold pheasant which Ferrier had just placed upon it.

"Turn and turn about," he exclaimed; "fair-play is a jewel, isn't it, Mr Ferrier? At least, perhaps it is not in your line of life. 'Summum jus summa injuria,' and that sort of thing.

But here you go on with your lunch and I will have a turn at Loder's plate. Your name is Loder, is it not?" (this to Dick); "my name is Treherne. I know your brother a little: Graham is his name, isn't it? He is in the Coldstreams too—not my lot, you know, the other battalion. But I meet him at the Club now and again. Good fellow too; we all like him. I wish he was here to-day."

Here a rather supercilious-looking young man with yellow hair and an elaborately curled moustache of the same hue varied the proceedings by suddenly addressing Ferrier.

"I say, Mr Ferrier," he drawled, twirling his moustache as he spoke, "may I ask whether it is the rule of your profession always to shoot other men's towering birds?"

There was an air of studied impertinence about the query which might well have ruffled any man's temper, and Dick could not help casting a hurried glance at Ferrier to see how he would take it.

"I beg your pardon," said the latter very quietly, "but I am afraid I did not quite catch the purport of your question. Might I ask you to repeat it?"

A second edition of an obvious impertinence is seldom successful. Nor was it so in this case, though Dick noted that there was a variation from the original version.

"I wanted to know just as a matter of curiosity whether you made it your rule in life to shoot other men's towering birds."

"Ah, a personal question only," and Ferrier hardly looked up from his plate as he spoke; "I hoped it might be professional and carry a fee. Well, no, I do not think that I make it a rule in my life, but there are exceptions occasionally. I may have done so by mistake now and again."

"Well, the mistakes or the exceptions seem to occur pretty often then. You shot two of mine in one beat this morning."

Before Ferrier had any chance of making a reply Bertie Treherne struck in—

"Do you make it a rule in your life to hit towering birds in

the tail, Chevely? or rather do the birds you hit in the tail always tower? I am only asking for curiosity, you know, because if they do I call it very unfair. On that principle, three-quarters of the pheasants I do hit ought to tower, but they don't somehow,—they only go off with what you may call their steering apparatus disarranged like yours did this morning, and I call it a charity when some other fellow is kind enough to finish them off for me."

"Bravo, Bertie, one for you, Chevely," exclaimed Lord Leuchars, who had been listening to Chevely's remarks with far less patience than the object of the attack. "Kill them clean while you are about it, man, and then you needn't talk about towerers. And now I think that if you have all finished we had better make a start. Afternoons are short at this time of the year."

As in obedience to their host's suggestion the party rose from the table, the man Chevely looked daggers at Bertie Treherne and half opened his mouth to speak, but apparently thinking better of it, walked off muttering something to himself.

"Now, Loder," remarked Bertie, "if Mr Ferrier can spare you, and you would like to see a little fancy shooting, you may as well come along with me and give me a hint or two."

"Yes, go with him by all means, Dick, and stop him from talking if you can," put in Lord Leuchars; "but you are a good boy, Bertie, all the same," he added, resting his hand for a moment on Bertie's shoulder as he spoke. "Here, Ferrier, I want you to come next to me, and we will put Bertie on the other side of you. He knows when he is in good company at all events. Confound that young Chevely's impertinence: I wonder what he will be saying next."

"And where was I to put Mr Chevely, my lord?" inquired the head-keeper, who had come up and was waiting for his directions as to posting the guns.

"Mr Chevely can go to the—— no, I mean with the beaters," said Lord Leuchars, hastily correcting himself, "and then he can keep on the outside right and stop there. We

will have no more shifting of places this afternoon. So you stick to the outside left, Bertie, and I daresay Dick Loder will put you up to a wrinkle or two. Let Mr Chevely and the two guns next to him take it in turns to go back with the beaters, Hill. There are four more beats, are there not?"

"Yes, my lord, four more beats."

"Then Mr Chevely can walk with the beaters in the first and fourth. And we will hope," he added to Ferrier as they moved away, "that the young butcher will pick up some manners from some of our beaters, as he does not seem to have many of his own. I can't imagine why my lady is so fond of having him here. I can't stand the fellow myself, and I can see that Bertie don't cotton to him. A good lad that, Laurence,—talks a bit too much when he is out shooting, but a thorough little gentleman every inch of him."

In the mean time Dick Loder and Bertie were leisurely wending their way towards the outside right in obedience to the instructions they had received.

"Were they really towering birds?" inquired Dick as soon as the pair were out of earshot of the other guns.

"May have been for all I know to the contrary," was the candid reply, "and who the devil cares whether they were or not, except perhaps that conceited ass Chevely? Anyhow I wasn't going to have him ragging old Ferrier, who is a deuced sight better fellow than Chevely is ever likely to be, though he may not be as good a shot. I like old Ferrier. He's the sort of fellow who don't say much, but I'll lay my life he thinks a lot. Now, as the Rajah—I always call his lordship the Rajah—says, I talk a lot, but I don't think much."

"Well, you shut up Chevely pretty neatly anyhow," and Dick regarded his companion with some admiration, as it suddenly flashed across his memory that somewhere or another not so very long ago some one had in his presence described this man, who was now disparaging his own intellectual powers, as far and away the cleverest fellow of his time at Eton.

"Good job too," responded Bertie. "Who wants to hear an

ass like Chevely jawing and laying down the law? He jawed in the smoking-room last night and jawed me out of it. I didn't mean to stop there long anyhow, that's one comfort. It's not much fun for your host, if he don't smoke himself, when all the other men in the house go off to the smoking-room and leave him out in the cold; so I just went and routed him up in the hall, and then Ferrier came and joined us. I say, Loder," suddenly changing the subject, "his lordship thinks no end of a lot of you,—not your shooting only, you know,—and so does Ferrier. It is a beastly nuisance being smashed up on a bike, and not being able to shoot and all that, but, if I had to be smashed up at all, I would a precious soon rather be smashed up by a man like Ferrier than by an ass like Chevely. There now, the Rajah is shaking his fist at me, so sit tight."

However, not even the dread of his host's displeasure was sufficiently pronounced to prevent the volatile young gentleman from keeping up a running commentary on his own performances.

"Got him, got him too, by Jove! missed him; missed him again; no, got him, got him behind as usual; in front that time, that's better, and that," as he missed a rabbit, "is worse; ah, you silly beggar!" for the rabbit had unwisely sat still in the middle of the drive; "you forgot I had a second barrel, did you? Take that, then; oh, bother it," the rabbit having run back into the covert just as he fired; "why the devil will rabbits always run just when you don't expect them to; one for you, old jaybird—that will stop your croaking; not dead! take that then; you're dead now, dead for a ducat. Oh, here are the beaters, and aren't those Chevely's yellow legs? I know he has got yellow legs like a game-cock,—not that there's much game about him except what he shoots. Think I could tickle up Chevely without touching a beater, eh, Loder?"

"I shouldn't try if I were you," answered Dick, laughing.

"Well, I won't then. But it's Chevely right enough.

Now I will bet that he comes here and jaws. Yes," in response to a question from a beater, "there are two or three animals of a sort to pick up somewhere there."

"Had a good stand, Treherne?" inquired Chevely, who for reasons of his own thought it impolitic to keep up a feud with Lord Leuchars' favourite youngster.

"First-class, thanks. Hope you have had a pleasant walk." Bertie spoke in his most urbane manner. "Yes, that's the lot, thank you," as the beater brought out on to the drive two pheasants, a jay, and three rabbits.

"Oh, that is your first-class stand, is it?" and in a moment Chevely was sorry that he had spoken.

"Ah, we have not picked up our towerers yet," and Bertie proceeded to check them off upon his fingers; "there were those two without tails that went on, and one with a tail that Lord Leuchars finished, my bird of course, and—oh, by the way, didn't one of my towerers come back your way, Cheveley? You must have seen it, it had one shot in a leg, and you——"

"Oh, you be d—d!" and with this parting remark Chevely walked off to take his place for the next beat.

"I doubt if that man loves you very dearly, Treherne," observed Dick, who had taken no part in the conversation.

"Nobody wants him to," was the ready response, "and I don't love him either, and that is the long and short of it. He is not my sort a bit, though he was at Eton with me. He was older than I was, but I was in the sixth form when he left, and he was nowhere near it. I can't understand why a fellow of that sort ever wants to go to Eton at all. If a fellow is not a gentleman to start with, not Eton or any other place is going to make him one. And it is not as if he had gone there to work, or to play either, if it comes to that. If a fellow wants to do any good to a school, or a school to do any good to him, he must either work or play, both for choice, but one or other at any rate. He must not be a simple loafer anyhow. Now, you know, Loder—you

weren't at Eton, I know—a lot of men think that fellows cannot or do not work at Eton. That is all bosh; you can work there just as well as you can work at any other place, and my experience is that most of the fellows do work there. I was there five years myself, and I worked pretty hard most of the time, and I loved the place, and I had a very good time, and they were all very kind to me. But it sickens me to see a fellow like Chevely going about the world and doing no good, and giving himself airs and all that just because he was at Eton. And then some silly fools go and take him for a specimen of an Etonian, and run down the place just because they see a man like Chevely. No, I don't love Chevely and he don't love me, and there let's leave the beast if you don't mind. And now I must hold my tongue or I shall have the Rajah down upon me," and as if the thought of Chevely had dried up the wells of his conversational powers, Bertie made no further remark until the conclusion of the beat. It was not, indeed, until they were well on their way to the next stand that he suddenly came out with the question, "You are an Oxford man, the Rajah says, Loder. What is your college?"

"St Hilary's."

"Oh!" And Bertie pulled up short in the middle of the ride and looked his companion up and down, giving the latter for a moment a sort of uncomfortable impression that Treherne had never before in his life encountered a fellow who owned up fairly to being a member of a comparatively unknown college, and now wanted to see what manner of man St Hilary's was capable of turning out. It was on the tip of his tongue for a moment to inform Treherne, in case he might be ignorant of the fact, that only a few years back St Hilary's had been head of the river, but he repressed the inclination and for some time watched Treherne's shooting in silence.

Suddenly the latter turned to him, and said very quietly and very gravely—

"Do you know that I am very glad that you are at St Hilary's? If I had gone to Oxford myself, I should have gone to St Hilary's. Most of the Eton men I know at Oxford are at Christ Church or New, but the very best fellow—no, I mean fellows—I ever knew in my life came from St Hilary's."

Infinitely relieved and much delighted, Dick eagerly inquired the names of the heroes.

"Well, there was George Ronald, who was killed at Henley—perhaps you knew of it;" Dick nodded, and then Bertie went on talking rapidly but in a low voice, "I was there at the time, and I saw it all. It was too awful, poor old George! You've no idea what a good fellow he was, so brave and so strong and so true. I used to wake up at nights and think of it for months and months afterwards. But there, it is all past and gone now, and," he sighed as he spoke, "I suppose it was better that way. Oh, bother, that is the third creature that has gone right over the top of my head, and there is the Rajah shaking his fist at me, so I must get back to business. I'll tell you about the others presently;" and in a few minutes Bertie's cheery laugh rang out again as he tailed a cock-pheasant himself, and then saw Lord Leuchars miss it clean with both barrels.

"I'd give a sovereign to see Chevely do that," he exclaimed, "but I'll have it out with the Rajah anyhow. I'll bet he won't shake his fist at me again in a hurry. By Jove! there he has missed another. Got him myself, too;" and as the bird fell he took off his cap and bowed politely to his host, who returned the compliment.

"Come on, Loder," as the beat came to an end,—"I mean to keep out of the Rajah's reach till he has forgotten that I went to sleep. And if he is down on me later I have got those pheasants in reserve. Jove! didn't I wipe his eye just? But I wish it had been Chevely's. Now," as they hurried on, "about those other men. There was Ingram—of course you would not know him, and besides he was a don or a tutor or

whatever you call them, but a real good fellow, as plucky as you make them. He saved a lot of kids once, house on fire and a case of holding on by the eyelids, and you would not think to look at him that he was that sort of man at all, but Tom M'Gregor saw it all, and he told me that Ingram was simply splendid. And then there is Tom himself, one of the best; you must have heard of him, eh?"

Dick at once pleaded guilty to the indictment of knowing M'Gregor by repute. The one St Hilary's man who had been President of the O.U.B.C. and of Vincent's, and who had furthermore taken the College boat from somewhere near the bottom of the river to the top, was not likely to be soon forgotten.

"I've never seen him," he added, "but I know a man who was up with him, Montmorency, and he always says that he was a wonder."

"Montmorency," repeated Bertie,—"I don't think I know him. But you'll see Tom before long; he is going round the world now, but he is sure to find his way up to Oxford for a bit when he gets back. He is always going there. I've got to write to him at Yokohama or some such place soon, and I will tell him to be sure and look you up. He hasn't got to Japan yet, but that is where I had to write to. Till you know Tom you won't know one of the best fellows that ever stepped. And now I must just get in to the Rajah's good books again by blazing off an extra lot of cartridges. Dear old fussy, the Rajah! He don't mind your missing them, but if you don't shoot at them he thinks you're not keen and gets quite cross," and by way of establishing his character for keenness, Bertie shot away merrily at every bird that came in reach and a good many others besides.

"Quite a pile!" he remarked complacently, when, having added to his own trophies some half-dozen rabbits and three cock-pheasants which, having fallen to Chevely's gun, had been brought up by one of the beaters, he showed the lot off to Lord Leuchars as the result of his stand, winking at Dick as he spoke.

"That's not a bad show, is it?" he remarked.

"Bravo, Bertie!" and just as the words were out of Lord Leuchars' mouth, Chevely appeared on the scene.

"I say, has any one seen a beater with my game?" he exclaimed.

"How is it marked?" inquired Bertie with a great show of interest,—"a big C or what?"

Receiving no reply to his question, he next proceeded to suggest that it might have towered.

"Don't be an ass!" exclaimed Chevely impatiently; "I tell you there was a fellow carrying it."

"Ah, well," observed Bertie, "if they're only carried long enough they do tower sometimes, and go remarkably high too; but if you want some game to show for your walk, take some of mine, old chap."

Seeing that there was not much chance of getting anything sensible out of Bertie, and conscious that the feeling of the house was rather with that individual than himself, Chevely walked off to prosecute his inquiries elsewhere, while Dick accompanied Ferrier part of the way to the Mote.

"Are you going to join us to-morrow?" inquired Ferrier as they prepared to part company.

"If I possibly can, but I am afraid it is doubtful. I half promised my aunt that I would help her to entertain some people who are coming to lunch."

"Duty *v.* Pleasure, eh? But in case I don't see you again, you will ease my mind by dropping me a line now and again to tell me how that arm goes on. And if at any time there is anything I can do for you, Mr Loder, you don't know what a pleasure, and indeed I may add such a relief, it would be to me to have the chance of doing it. Now is there anything? Oh," as Dick seemed to hesitate, "there is something. Now do tell me what it is."

"Well," began Dick, "you know that man Stokes?"

"Stokes!" exclaimed Ferrier, laughing; "Stokes seems all the world to Mr Loder, and Mr Loder seems all the

world to Stokes. Come then, out with it: what can I do for Stokes?"

It seemed from what Dick had to say that Stokes had taken so kindly to the work which Fox had given him, and had found so much favour in the old keeper's eyes, that only a little encouragement was wanting to induce the latter to offer Dick's *protégé* a regular place on the staff. And Stokes, taking Dick into his confidence, had informed him that a permanent billet on the Mote estate with a nice little cottage up in the woods would suit him much better than his present more highly paid but more precarious employment.

"You see, Master Dick," the man had said in his own uncultured way, "for all the life is rough at our job, wages is wages when they comes along regular. But you give a chap a month's frost or a fall of snow so as them plaguy works stops a-working, and you don't have no buzzer nor no nothing not for weeks together, and then Harry Stokes and them as Harry Stokes did ought to find for—well, their bellies has to go empty. If it hadn't been along of you, Master Dick, and that other gentleman as calls himself a lawyer—not as there ain't more gentleman than lawyer about him—I don't know how I'd have made a shift to get along at all."

The substance of all this Dick now put so plainly before Ferrier that the latter, after laughingly assuring him that his own fortune was assured if he only made up his mind to go to the Bar, undertook to speak a word in season to Fox, or if occasion arose to Lord Leuchars himself.

Two days later Dick received a pencilled note from Ferrier which the latter had despatched by a special messenger from Westhampton Station:—

"By means of a little judicious flattery coupled with slight justifiable bribery the man you wrote of has received his commission, and will, I trust, do credit to your patronage. But why not speak for yourself, John, and give your willing horse a more pleasurable opportunity?—L. F."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN COLLEGE.

Rather more than a year later, on a February night some three weeks after the commencement of the Easter term, four men were standing round the fireplace of a ground-floor room in the back quad of St Hilary's. That the party was proposing to break up might be augured from the fact that they had just risen from the chairs, and that the hands of the clock were pointing to midnight, while a table strewed with a jumble of cards, which a fifth man, the host for the evening, was leisurely sorting, showed the nature of their late occupation.

"Just like you, Chettie," exclaimed the card-sorter, "to go and throw the packs into a heap. It would serve you right to make you sort them yourself, you old nuisance, you."

"You would have done the same, old boy, if you had been looed the one fiver of the evening, and then played for your own loo with ace queen, and only taken back a bally sovereign."

The speaker was a blue-eyed and curly-headed youth with a distinctly good face, a face generally beaming with smiles, but now for the moment wearing a look of slight irritation,—not by any means the face of a typical or successful gambler, for the simple reason that it was over-full of expression, and that it was easy for any one who studied it to gather a fairly accurate idea of the class of hand which the owner of the face was holding.

"Perhaps I should, and perhaps I shouldn't; but bother you all the same, Chettie," and Dick Loder glanced at the clock as he put away the cards which he had finished sorting in a drawer.

"And bother you too, Dick," exclaimed another member of the party, a tall, dark-haired, and beetle-browed man, who looked a year or two older than the rest of the company. "What the dickens do you want to interrupt our game for, just as it was getting interesting too, with your confounded conscientious scruples?"

"Hold hard, Sadler, old fellow," struck in a fourth man who had not yet spoken; "a man's house is his castle, and I suppose his rooms are his castle too, and the conscience clause is sound enough as far as it goes. If Dick Loder has got his scruples, let him have them and keep them for all I care. I used to draw the line myself at playing cards on a Sunday myself once, and—well, anyhow, let a fellow do what he likes in his own rooms, I say."

"Oh, that is what you think, is it, Wood? Well, I am sure that every one is much obliged to you for giving us the benefit of such a learned and such an original opinion," began Sadler in a sneering voice; but seeing that he was in a minority, he suddenly changed his tone, and with a bad grace partially conceded the point in question. "Well, after all, scruples are all right, I suppose. If a man has scruples he is welcome to them for all I care, as long as he does not expect me to have them too. But it is the time I am thinking of; I don't consider that Sunday morning begins till—well, till I get up."

At this somewhat tame conclusion Chetwynde burst out laughing.

"Oh, then, you would make Sunday a sort of movable feast or fast, to commence at whatever hour of the day the great John Sadler chooses to get out of bed? And pray may I ask at what hour the day would end?—at such time, I suppose, as your potency might elect to seek the downy again."

"Hall-time, of course, and then we could make a night of

it," answered Sadler. "Well, as it is decreed that there is to be no more loo, I may as well be jogging. Coming my way, Wood? Coming, Emden?"

"Well, yes, it's about time to turn in," said the person last addressed. "Who is the winner to-night, by the way?"

"Loder, of course, *toujours* Loder; that is why the beggar was so keen to stop."

"Think so, Sadler, do you?" and Dick looked up sharply from a book which he had just taken in his hand. "Well, you are quite welcome to think so if you like. But am I a winner? I didn't know it if I am. Yes, by Jove!" turning out the contents of his pocket and putting the money on the table. "I have won—let me see what—the very large sum of five—no, four shillings. I had four sovereigns and a fiver and a shilling, and now I have got the four sovereigns and five shillings and—well, not the fiver exactly, but an I O U of Chettie's, pretty much the same thing."

For the instant Chetwynde looked rather disconsolate, then he laughed and said—

"Well, I'm glad that you are satisfied, Dick. But I have not got your fiver anyhow, old chap. I have got that one blessed sovereign, and two or three odd shillings, and I've lost three thick 'uns of ready and that five pounds to you."

"Ah, well, a stray fiver then has gone into somebody's pocket at all events," observed Dick. "I wonder if it has gone into yours by any chance, Sadler? I take it that you are the real winner after all."

"Perhaps I am, but I really hardly know: I don't pretend to keep a very exact account."

"Possibly that is the reason why your statements as to other people's winnings and losings are not very exact either," murmured Chetwynde. "One way or another I seem to have lost as near forty pounds as thirty in three weeks, and I suppose that some one has won it, but I doubt whether it is Dick Loder."

"I can soon tell you," said Dick, who had been totting up

a few figures in a small pocket-book; "my accounts stand—pro, twenty-seven pounds and half-a-crown; con, twenty-four, fifteen. So I don't come out a loser on the term at all events, though I have not got quite so much ready as I started with."

"Talking of ready," put in Sadler, "I see that I have got fifteen ten of your paper, Master Chetwynde. I suppose that cannot quite be called ready, can it? I think I had better put it up to auction and realise."

Chetwynde coloured and was about to make an angry reply, when Dick Loder interposed—

"I should not bother to do that, if I were you, Sadler. I am quite ready to take it off your hands; so pass it over and I will give you a cheque, which you can convert into ready on Monday."

This direct acceptance of his challenge rather took Sadler aback. He had known all along as well as every other man in the room that, barring accidents, Chetwynde's paper was safe enough. Now and again that young gentleman might temporarily outrun the constable, but it was notorious that he always paid up in the long-run; and if an open winter had for the time being crippled his resources by costing him more than usual in the way of horse-flesh during the vacation, the 25th of March was looming in the distance, when every penny that he owed would be paid without a regret and without a murmur.

Having then fired off an unpleasant speech by way of punishing Chetwynde for his unnecessary remarks on the matter of inaccuracy of accounts, Sadler felt that he had only succeeded in putting himself, instead of the original offender, into an awkward position, and a self-created awkward position is of all the most unsatisfactory and the most difficult to abandon.

"Oh, I was only rotting," he said with some confusion; "you need not jump down a fellow's throat like that, Loder."

"But I have written the cheque," replied Dick, without taking any notice of the last remark. "There," as he blotted

the document and handed it to Sadler. "Oh, I have only made it for fifteen pounds; shall I add the shillings, or have you got half a sovereign?"

"We'll call that discount if you like, or I'll toss you double or quits."

The attempt to pass off the matter as a jest failed of its mark.

"I am not a bill-discounter, thank you, and I don't toss on Sundays. Oh, you have got half a sovereign, thanks," as he handed Sadler a sovereign; "that is twenty pound ten you owe me, Chettie," and he carelessly tossed the I O U he had just received, and that which Chetwynde had given him half an hour before, into the fire—a proceeding which brought a smile to the faces of three persons in the room, and reduced a fourth to a state of boiling though silent indignation.

"Well, I must be going; good night, everybody," said Wood, moving to the door, and Emden followed his example—Sadler, who also left the room, taking his departure without vouchsafing any word of leave-taking.

"Stay and smoke a pipe, Chettie," suggested Dick; "I shan't turn in for another half hour: excuse my manners," and with that he filled his own pipe and then pushed the tobacco-jar to his guest.

Chetwynde filled his pipe in silence, and for two or three minutes the two men sat smoking in front of the fire without speaking.

"That was very good of you, Dick," at last remarked Chetwynde, "and very, very like Dick Loder. But why did you do it, old man?"

"Why shouldn't I if I like? It does not make the smallest fraction of difference to me whether a man called Parsons or a man called Chetwynde has a few shekels of mine in his keeping. One does not pay me any more interest than the other, and the money is equally safe with either. But now I'll ask you a question. Do you like that fellow Sadler?"

Chetwynde shook his head.

"No more do I, then. There are times when I should dearly love to kick him, and so would you, I bet. And you see one can't very well kick a man if one happens to owe him money."

"But you don't owe him any money."

"You did, though, and you might want to kick him some day. You would have liked to kick him to-night, and very likely would have done it if I had not shoved my oar in. What is more, the fellow meant to be nasty—he often is nasty—and I thought I might as well put a stopper to his nastiness in my own room at all events."

"I believe the beggar had the grace to be a bit ashamed of himself," suggested Chetwynde; "he did not exactly jump at your cheque."

Dick nodded to himself two or three times and smiled before he answered.

"I had another shot in my locker for him, if that had missed fire. No," forestalling his companion's question, "I shan't tell you what, so you need not ask. But I say, Chettie, why on earth do you and I see so much of a man we do dislike—a nasty man, too?"

"Why does one see so much of a nasty man one dislikes?" and after repeating Dick's question to himself, Chetwynde proceeded to supply a partial answer. "Well, I do it because I am a fool, I think, Dick, a weak, good-natured fool, and that is the long and short of the matter. But why or how one Dick Loder follows my bad example, well, I confess, Dick, that entirely passes my poor comprehension. Dick," and rising from his chair he spoke quite impatiently, "why do you?"

Before Dick Loder could make any attempt to solve this knotty problem, there came an interruption in the form of two kicks and then a heavy knock on the door, accompanied by a loud shout.

"Dick, Dick Loder, have you gone to bed?"

"Come in and find out, you fool," roared Dick; "who the

dickens is it?" as the door slowly opened, and a figure clad in a heavy ulster stood in the semi-darkness at the far end of the room. "Why, if it isn't old Montmorency. Dear old Monty!"

And in a moment the two previous occupants of the room were wellnigh overwhelming with their tumultuous and cordial greeting a stout clean-shaven man, who was attempting the impossible task of divesting himself of his ulster and shaking hands with the two men at the same time. There was no question in this case as to the heartiness of the welcome—indeed the evident good-nature that beamed on every feature of Montmorency's fat round face seemed to bring its own welcome with it. In another minute, after much expostulation and much involuntary grunting, he had been divested of his ulster, forcibly thrust into the largest chair in the room, and was being bombarded with questions and hospitable offers.

"Have a drink, old man. Have a smoke, Monty. Sit still, you old beggar, and tell us all about it. Where have you come from? Where have you been to? How did you get into College at this time of night? What have you come for?"

To all these questions and many more Montmorency, with occasional pauses and the aid of a slight stutter, which Chetwynde, who had one way or another enjoyed the pleasure of his acquaintance for more than ten years, declared to be quite a modern accomplishment, gave tolerably lucid answers. From these it appeared that, having had no time to put on his gown in the previous term when he had passed his last school, he had now come up in anticipation of a degree day on Monday, that the Dean had kindly offered him rooms in College, that he had not reached the station till a quarter-past eleven, and that happening to meet the Bursar in the porter's lodge, he had gone with him to his rooms in order to get certain matters connected with fees, caution-money, &c., &c., satisfactorily settled. Furthermore, Montmorency was enabled to produce quite an interesting piece of intelligence.

"Tut-Tom M'Gregor is up. He was with the Bub-Bursar."

"M'Gregor up?" exclaimed Chetwynde; "what has he come up for? Is he going to stay any time by any chance?"

"I think he is going to take his mum-master's. But then he is going to stay up for some time too."

"By Jove! what luck! I wonder if he'd like to take that wretched torpid in hand for a week or two? I'm sick to death of them. You never saw such a gang of duffers, Monty; but I think they're not much worse than Queen's or Jesus, so that they may sit tight for the first night or two."

"I think he is going to cuc-coach the 'Varsity; at least he told me so."

"Well, as Tom M'Gregor is not by way of being a habitual liar, if he told you that he was going to coach the 'Varsity, he is going to coach the 'Varsity, my dear cautious old Monty. And good business too! I take it that he will be pretty well down on the massive slug element."

Chetwynde, although it was a subject which he did not care to talk about, had for some time been secretly resenting the fact that whereas places had been found in the 'Varsity boat for two heavy weights who had rowed in the losing Trial Eight, of which he had proved himself a neat and hard-working bow, no further trial had been given either to himself or to several other men of his calibre.

"Massive slug element? What is a massive slug when he is at home? Anything like old Monty here? he's massive enough in all conscience, and I don't believe he could run two yards to save his life."

"You always were a ch-cheeky young beggar, Dick Loder," blurted out Montmorency, quite indignant for the moment. "I rowed like blazes in that torpid of ours, didn't I, Chettie?" and having so framed his question that it admitted of only one strictly grammatical and strictly polite answer, he glanced rather anxiously at Chetwynde by way of inviting him to supply the desired affirmative.

All men have their petty vanities, and most of us our sore points, not always visible to the naked eye, but actively

existent notwithstanding. The petty vanity of that most guileless and simple-hearted of mortals, Augustus Montmorency, had for some time past been an innate and wholly comforting conviction that on the one occasion on which he himself, then a fourth-year man, had rowed five in the College torpid, the comparative success of the boat, which had gone up one place, had been mainly due to his individual exertions: the sore point was that the claims of a man who weighed nearer fifteen than fourteen stone, and was, notwithstanding his weight, rather short in the back, had not been taken into serious consideration when the summer eight had been chosen. True, a small consolation prize had fallen to his lot, as he had been appointed treasurer of the College Boat Club, and in that capacity had spoken many words of wisdom to perspiring freshmen, to whom had been accorded the doubtful enjoyment of lugging their weighty mentor half a mile up-stream and back again to the barge in an abnormally heavy gig during the afternoons of a rather sultry May.

"It's cruelty to animals, I know," the captain had remarked; "but old Monty does know what to say, and he likes it if they don't."

"Of course you did," now assented Chetwynde; "you rowed like a Trojan. No, I didn't mean men like Monty here, Dick. I can testify of my own personal knowledge that he puffed like a grampus the whole way from Iffley to the barges, so that he must have taken something out of himself. I mean that sort of behemoth who weighs thirteen stone, rows in perfect form, doesn't do an ounce of work all the way, always loses by half a length, and then gets out of the boat as fresh as a daisy and says it was somebody else's fault. We won't mention names or colleges, but there are plenty of them about, and I take it that one or two are likely to get hold of the wrong end of the stick if Tom M'Gregor has a say in the matter; and he will have a say, too, if he has the coaching of the crew. You may lay your life on that."

"He is a real good sort, isn't he?" inquired Dick as he recalled his conversation with Bertie Treherne, and wondering whether the latter had ever carried out his promise of mentioning his name to M'Gregor. "What is he like to look at?"

"Why, you must have seen him—he di-dined at the high table."

"I didn't know he was there, you see, my good Monty, and so I did not look out for him. I don't think the high table is much worth looking at as a rule, but I should have looked to-night if I had known that M'Gregor was dining. And Chettie wasn't in hall."

"Oh, he's a ca-capital fellow is M'Gregor. I used to know him a little. He was up in my first year—a tremendously big man he was: he bo-borrowed my gown and my coat once, and he split the gown and stretched the coat most awfully—never the proper shape again, you know."

"Split your gown and stretched your coat! My dear old Monty, you must be romancing. At any rate, I vow that if M'Gregor did that, he could not have been dining in hall to-night, as he couldn't have got through the doorway. Why, man alive! a prize ox could wear your coat without stretching it."

"I'm not fa-fat, it's muscle," said Montmorency complacently.

"Muscle or fat, there's plenty of it, and I'm very glad to see it all here again," and for a few more minutes the three went on talking about indifferent matters.

When, after his companions had wished him good night, he found himself alone in his room, Dick still continued to sit in front of the fire and smoke, while he set himself in all seriousness the task of answering that question which Montmorency's appearance had caused to be left unanswered,—the question why he, Richard Loder, of all people in the world, should deliberately choose to associate with the man Sadler or other men of the same stamp, for whom he entertained no feeling whatever either of liking or respect. And when at the end of

a solid half-hour's thought he had arrived at the rather unsatisfactory conclusion that the root of the matter lay in the circumstance that "things have gone criss-cross with him," he went to bed, and then, after the manner of young men, postponing reflection to a more convenient season, shortly fell asleep.

Criss-cross? To a certain extent it may not be denied that the stars in their courses had fought against this young man, Dick Loder. He had come up to Oxford sixteen months ago, if not exactly with a mind full of good resolutions or a brain revolving weighty purposes, at any rate a sound, well-meaning, and high-principled youth, on good terms with himself and with society at large, overflowing with generous impulses and hearty enthusiasm. The prospect had looked fair and smiling in front of him.

Few prizes in the University world seemed hopelessly beyond his reach. With a marked capacity for assimilating knowledge without undue exertion, he had in his scholarship examination shown up composition and translation of a quality that fairly made the mouths of the examiners water, and caused feelings of envious disappointment in the breast of more than one College Tutor when it was discovered that Richard Loder had elected to go to St Hilary's in preference to the Tutor's own College.

In the Parks Dick had in his first term fairly vindicated the opinion long ago pronounced by various captains of visiting teams that "young Loder at Marlborough was one of the very best three-quarter backs of the day." True, a prolonged frost that set in a fortnight before the end of the winter term, and caused the Inter-University match to be indefinitely postponed, had robbed him of his Blue. For after the vacation he had come back with his arm in a sling, and another man had taken his place in the all-important match of the season. The summer term, and then again the succeeding football season, had found him still partially maimed, and as a general result the two things that stood to the credit side of his account at the end of

his fourth term at Oxford were a first-class—not a particularly good first-class, for his books had been shaky—in Moderations, and that amount of prestige which attaches itself to a man of whom it is said that he certainly would have played for his University in the Rugger match, and possibly in the cricket XI., if he had not had an accident. A most untoward circumstance had that incident of the broken arm proved to be. The limb had obstinately refused to set properly, and had had to be rebroken and reset; for a time, indeed, there had been grave doubts whether Dick would not have a permanently stiff limb: only within the last few weeks had he regained the full use of it, and football was still a forbidden pastime. To a fellow of pronounced athletic tastes, accustomed to take constant and strong exercise, a keen lover of all ball-games, the prolonged exclusion from his favourite recreations had been even less tolerable than the weeks and months of recurrent and at times severe physical pain. Few people would have suspected how deeply Dick Loder in his heart of hearts resented and groaned over his disablement. As at the time he had accepted the accident itself gracefully enough, had grinned and borne it, as the saying goes, so too later on it had never entered into his mind to harbour the slightest feeling of resentment against the author of it, and he had rather thought of Laurence Ferrier as the generous donor of the very best bicycle in the market and the writer of occasional charming letters than in any other light. But to a sensitive nature the feeling that he was, so far as outdoor occupations were concerned, a useless member of society, cumbering the ground, the thought that now in the heyday of his youth he could not do the things that he had been accustomed to do, and that he had hoped to go on doing, was intensely mortifying, — mortifying almost to the extent of warping his better nature. For from a moral as well as from a hygienic point of view the enforced abstinence from his wonted habits of violent exercise was fraught with grave results. Even the most complacent of mortals is apt in time to grow weary of passive waiting and watching—waiting for the

power to return to the old habits, watching the sometimes bad, sometimes good, and commonly indifferent performances of others in those fields of sport wherein he was himself in times past wont to excel.

"Coming up to watch in the Parks to-day, Dick?" some friend would say.

"What's the good? I'm sick of watching," and for a whole afternoon Dick, naturally a most restless being, would sit and mope in his rooms alone, longing for the evening to come, when at all events he would find some form of excitement and a game in which he need not be, by reason of his crippled state, at a disadvantage with the other players. "It is a poor heart that never rejoices" was his argument to himself; "if I can't play cricket or football, I can play cards at all events. Cards let it be, then."

In other words, in default of a healthy excitement he sought excitement in a less vigorous and less manly form—in a form that threw him into the company of men of an inferior type to those with whom under other circumstances he would by choice have associated. At the University a fairly good estimate of a man's character may be formed from the nature of his amusements. There being a direct and necessary antagonism between the keeping of late hours and successful athletics, it is only in isolated cases that he who has set his heart on winning high honours on the river or in the cricket-field will be found in the stuffy and smoke-impregnated atmosphere of a card-room or a billiard-room in the late hours of the night.

Most unfortunately, too, at this period of his career Dick was at variance with more than one member of the Senior Common-room—not that sort of variance which among school-boys generally culminates in a good stand-up fight and better relations thereafter, but variance of an unwholesome and unsatisfactory character, a species of hostility which crops up at odd times and in odd places, and never seems to lead to any compensating results,—a sort of Polemos Aspondos, where

each party uses trivial and petty methods to compass the annoyance of the other. There were faults, no doubt, on both sides: want of tact and sensible management, stupid and uncalled-for interference with the liberty of the subject, on the part of the ruling powers; a sense of imaginary as well as real grievance, a distrust of motive, no small amount of self-conceit, on the part of the undergraduate.

In the first place, there had been constant bickerings between Dick and the Dean, most kind-hearted, most simple-minded, and in St Hilary's still as in aforetime most potent of dons. The dear old Dean, who would have walked a quarter of a mile out of his way in order to avoid treading upon a worm, who would have cut off his right hand rather than of design wound the feelings of the most hopelessly perverse and stupid undergraduate or the least important of the College servants, had on more than one occasion sadly ruffled our young scholar's temper, and the latter had retaliated by wantonly assailing the Dean in his tenderest points.

In the original quarrel between the two, Dick had been distinctly in the wrong. And yet a man with more knowledge of the world than the Dean, or even a man less anxious to teach the light of truth to all who had gone astray, would either have ignored the matter altogether as a thing unlikely to occur again, or would have put it to Dick in a light which the latter, as having plenty of sound common-sense, could hardly have misinterpreted.

What had happened was simply this. On a certain night during Dick's first term at Oxford it had come to the Dean's notice that not one only but some seven or eight of the scouts were undeniably the worse for liquor. On inquiring into the cause of this unwonted phenomenon, the Dean discovered that towards the end of dinner-time, when men had well drunk of the College ale, and were not likely to require much more, Mr Loder having, on making a Latin quotation, been most properly sconced by the senior scholar present, had conceived himself to be unjustly treated. And accordingly, partly in jest and

partly by way of experiment, he had floored his sconce, and then exercised—it was certainly the first time such a thing had occurred for many years—his privilege of sconcing the whole table. The effect upon the moral, mental, and physical equilibrium of the scouts, when treasure-trove in the form of nineteen almost untasted tankards of good College ale fell into their clutches, was disastrous in the extreme.

"When the little heart is full,
A little sets it off."

In other words, it is to be feared that a few of the St Hilary's scouts, who passed as sober men, were generally only just sober, and now the very liberal extra allowance turned the scale. John, who waited on the gentlemen in the Senior Common-room, gave so many audible and, truth to say, rather vulgar proofs of the condition he was in, that finally the Bursar thus solemnly addressed him—

"Either stop hiccoughing at once, John, or leave the room and send some other servant who does not hiccough."

In default of power to attain to the former, John wisely chose the latter alternative. But as no man appeared to take his place, there was ground for supposing that there was no such person as a scout, warranted not to hiccough, anywhere handy on the premises that night. And mean time six jovial souls had invaded the College kitchen, where, by singing "He" (presumably Mr Richard Loder) "is a jolly good fellow," they so much upset the under-cook that he refused to be comforted until such time as when, after having swallowed nearly two full tankards on his own account, he took heart and personally inaugurated a rollicking Dutch chorus. All this was extremely mortifying to the Dean, who had cherished in his soul the delusion that the scouts at St Hilary's—at St Hilary's only, of course—were wholly proof to temptation; but it was unfortunate that, more shocked perhaps by this proof of Mr Loder's powers of absorption than by the inebriated condition of the scouts, he should have jumped to the unwise conclusion that

the young man was addicted to performances of this character, and so, setting him down in his mind as a gluttonous fellow and a wine-bibber, should have tried to improve the occasion by reading him a lengthy lecture on the demoralising effects of habitual drunkenness.

"It is not too late to check the habit, Mr Loder, I trust. But a habit thus early formed——"

"But I didn't want the beastly beer," explained the culprit; "I only drank it as a protest against a senseless custom."

"The sconce, Mr Loder, is an institution of long standing, tending to promote the greater harmony and the greater decorum of the dinner-table."

"If one tankard of beer can promote harmony and decorum, why should not nineteen tankards promote more harmony and decorum, sir?" suggested Dick, who was inclined to treat the whole matter as an excellent joke.

The mathematical deduction did not appeal to the Dean in the least degree in the world. Merely accounting the remark as flippant, which it undoubtedly was, he reverted to his previous line of attack.

"If a young man wilfully blinds himself to the inevitable consequences of embarking on a career of dissipation—indeed, I may say the most vulgar of all forms of dissipation, Mr Loder—all I can say is that I am sorry for him. Still, it is no less my duty to warn him. Good morning, Mr Loder," and away went Dick, imbued with the conviction that the Dean was an unreasonable old fool.

Later on came a question of "knocking in" somewhere between ten and twelve, night after night, always in the Dean's eyes a proof that a young man was going to the bad—herding, that is, with geese of a vastly inferior class to those which pastured within the walls of St Hilary's.

"But I have got so many friends out of College," was Dick's argument—to a man of the Dean's way of thinking, an unfortunate argument to employ.

"When we elected you a scholar of this College, Mr Loder, we had expected that you would look for your friends in St Hilary's. It is far better that a young man should find his acquaintances in his own College."

"But half the men in the College are such ass—I mean I don't know them very well," said Dick, correcting himself just in time.

"Perhaps you have not taken sufficient pains to cultivate their friendship, Mr Loder. I can answer you that the young men at St Hilary's are, and in fact always have been, of a very superior stamp."

It was on the tip of Dick's tongue to say that some of them were of a very dull stamp, but he prudently restrained himself and only remarked that he was afraid it was rather difficult to live up to them. And the end of that interview was that he was gated for a week, by way, as the Dean put it, of giving him more abundant opportunity of discovering those good points in his fellow-collegians which had hitherto escaped his notice.

"'Prendite præcipitem, post est occasio calva'—but I'm not going to have it crammed down my throat all the same," muttered Dick to himself as he left the Dean's room. "If the mountain can't go to Mahomet, Mahomet must come to the mountain."

And a good many Mahomets did come to the mountain in that week, and some of them were of a lively and cheery disposition—so much so, in fact, that the Bursar declared that the place was more like a bear-garden than a college. The Dean on inspecting the gate-book was considerably startled to discover that about four times as many strangers had "knocked out" in that particular week as in any other week of the term. But so artfully had Dick laid his plans that it was impossible to identify him with the author of this unusual amount of hospitality. The gate-book showed that some twenty or more undergraduates had had two or three late visitors apiece, and even the Dean was not prepared to say that

any exception could be taken to the presence of an occasional visitor.

But the crisis of the quarrel and the crowning sense of being unjustly dealt with arrived when, in his second term, Dick was hauled for irregularity of attendance in chapel. Then the very foolish young man elected to stand upon his dignity, and offer no explanation of any kind in preference to entering the plea that a person with a broken arm could hardly be expected to be consistently punctual in the morning.

"A sad falling off, Mr Loder, a sad falling off! One morning chapel only in a whole week. Dear me! dear me! And no chapel again this morning! For the rest of this week, Mr Loder, I must request that you keep every morning chapel without fail."

This was on a Monday, and on the following Saturday morning a conscientious scout duly reported to the Dean that Mr Loder had never slept in his bed for the last five nights. For a moment the idea flashed across the Dean's mind that Mr Loder had levanted altogether, but a reference to the gate-book and to the chapel list showed that, contrary to his usual custom, the young gentleman had not knocked in on one single night during the week, and that he had kept five morning chapels. Absolutely at his wits' end, the Dean sent for Mr Loder. Now, had our worthy Dean been an observant man, or anything else but preternaturally near-sighted, he could not have failed to notice that Dick, in addition to wearing his arm in a sling, had deep black lines under his eyes, and a weary look on his face that told a true tale of physical pain and exhaustion. Most unfortunately the Dean noticed nothing of the sort; most unfortunately, too, Dick was in that jaundiced and irritable frame of mind that courts voluntary martyrdom in preference to the offering a few words of explanation.

"I slept in my chair, sir,—it was the safest way of being up for morning chapel; and then I had my bath and dressed after chapel."

"What a very unusual proceeding, Mr Loder!" exclaimed

the Dean; and after waiting for a minute in order to give the young man the chance of further explanation, when he found that Dick maintained a stony silence he went on to pass sentence: Mr Loder was required to keep at least five chapels, whether evening or morning in each week, and was requested to consider himself gated after hall in any week following that in which he might have failed to keep the prescribed number.

Dick kept as many chapels as he felt inclined to, gated himself according to the Dean's order most conscientiously, and took to playing cards in College, and occasionally putting in a spell of work in the evening. If he meant to get a first in Moderations, a certain amount of reading had become a matter of positive necessity. For he had now embarked in a pretty considerable quarrel with Carr, late of Balliol, who had been elected to Ingram's vacant fellowship, and had succeeded the latter as lecturer for Honour Mods. There was no gainsaying the fact that Carr's manner with undergraduates left much to be desired. He was at once supercilious, dogmatical, and impatient, and as in some respects the disciple's scholarship was quite as brilliant as that of his rabbi, and the disciple's disposition just in those days on the irritable side, small wonder that there came a day when Dick Loder announced in public at the conclusion of the lecture that there could be no object in continuing his attendance at Mr Carr's lectures, for the simple reason that he had no intention of taking up either of the books upon which the lectures were given.

"Rather a sudden resolution, isn't it, Mr Loder?" remarked Carr, somewhat taken by surprise, but not forgetting to employ his most supercilious manner. "'Facilis descensus Averni,' eh?"

"This hasn't been quite like heaven," blurted out Dick, and there was a universal titter.

"That is fortunate on the whole, perhaps, Mr Loder, as neither your manners nor your translation have been what I should call angelic," and at that moment Dick felt that he liked Carr better than he had ever done in his life before.

However, the attendance at the lectures came to an end, and as scant time was left for getting up fresh books, and Dick had now made up his mind that he would get a first, "just to score off Carr," he did on several evenings put in a spell of really serious reading. It by no means followed as a matter of course that a scholarship at St Hilary's implied a safe first in Moderations—indeed it might be said that the College considered that it had done well when a batch of scholars averaged seconds all through. When therefore it did so happen that Dick Loder scored the only first-class won by St Hilary's in that particular summer term, the circumstance set the Dean thinking that he might possibly have misjudged the young man. In the kindness of his heart he had put pen to paper and written a little conciliatory note, gracefully congratulating Dick on his success, and suggesting that he should like to see him on the subject of some books which the College was in the habit of presenting to those undergraduates who won distinction in the schools. But this olive-branch never reached its destination, for the simple reason that on the very day on which the class-list was published Dick, debarred from cricket, and having no particular inducement or occupation to detain him at Oxford, had sought an interview with the President and gained his permission to go down, and the Dean's note had in the course of the Long Vacation tidying-up found its way with other littered papers into the waste-paper basket or the dust-pan.

By a curious coincidence Dick had at one and the same blow considerably disgusted Lewis, the Mathematical lecturer, and established semi-friendly relations with the Bursar. On a December afternoon in Dick's first term the Bursar and Lewis were sitting alone in the Common-room. A heavy fall of snow had made the prospect out of doors distinctly uninviting, and the Common-room was perhaps the warmest place in the College next to the kitchen. Lewis was writing a letter, and the Bursar comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair by the fire reading the 'Times,' when all of a sudden there came almost simultaneously a crash of breaking glass, a muffled cry from

Lewis, from the Bursar a loud exclamation not entirely euphemistic. A snowball, hurled from a distance with considerable violence, having broken the window and then alighted on the exact centre of the massive inkstand, had carried the latter and its contents right into the ill-starred mathematician's lap with most disastrous results,—not to put too fine a point upon it, he was deluged with ink and inky snow-slush from top to toe. A bombshell could hardly have created greater devastation, so far at least as the effect upon the person, nerves, and garments of the unhappy Lewis was concerned. Almost before the Bursar had time to recover from his astonishment or to take in the situation, there was a sound of hurrying feet followed by a knock at the door, and then the door was cautiously opened, and a young man's head, and finally his body, appeared.

"Oh, I say, I didn't know there was any one in the room—I am most awfully sorry, you know. Oh, by Jove!" It was the sight of Lewis's condition that provoked the exclamation. "Allow me, sir," and in a second Dick Loder, with a large sheet of blotting-paper which he had snatched up in one hand and a silk pocket-handkerchief in the other, was attacking Lewis vigorously, but with the most benevolent intentions. In vain Lewis, misliking the ready assistance even more than the original assault, spluttered, growled, grunted, and protested. The spectacle of his brother don retreating round the room, while the undergraduate pursued him and made frantic dabs at different portions of his person with the blotting-paper and pocket-handkerchief alternately, was altogether too much for the Bursar's gravity, and after vainly struggling to keep his countenance and preserve his dignity, but failing, he resigned himself to the situation, and falling back in his chair, fairly shouted with laughter. The Bursar's laugh, like the Bursar's sneeze, was so stentorian in character that for a moment Dick suspended operations to stare at him, and Lewis took the opportunity of escaping, and retired to his own rooms in high dudgeon.

Finding himself alone in the room with Dick, who continued to stare at him, the Bursar by a great effort controlled his emotions, and putting on the sternest tone he could command, at a moment's notice proceeded to interrogate the culprit.

"Who are you, sir? What is your name?" he inquired, taking off his spectacles and wiping them that he might get a clearer view of the young man.

"Loder, sir," replied Dick submissively.

"Oh, it's Mr Loder, is it? Let me see. Are not you one of the scholars of the College?"

Dick bowed in answer to the question.

"Well then, Mr Loder," proceeded the Bursar, "may I ask whether you consider this a proper occupation for a scholar of the College, this"—he was still rather puzzled to know exactly what happened—"this—eh—hum—what was it exactly that you did?"

"I threw a snowball, sir. It was really all right. I mean, that is, it would have been all right if the other fellow hadn't ducked his head."

"Sensible fellow," interpolated the Bursar, who, having by aid of his spectacles had a really good look at Dick's face, had arrived at the conclusion that he was on the whole a more presentable and better-looking individual than most of the tribe of scholars.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Dick politely; "I did not exactly catch what you said."

"I said that the other young man was the more sensible fellow of the two, Mr Loder. Judging from the violence with which that missile of yours was hurled, I should say he would have been dead by this time if it had struck him on the head. Do you consider the throwing of snowballs to be a particularly gentlemanlike or—eh—scholarlike or improving occupation, Mr Loder?"

"One always snowballed at school," murmured Dick.

"But you are not at school now, Mr Loder, you are at

College, and we certainly cannot have the College quadrangle turned into a bear-garden by schoolboy performances."

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"Well — hum, then if you are really sorry, Mr Loder, I don't suppose there is anything more to be said. Don't let it occur again, please. You may go now, oh—eh—what did you say, Mr Loder?" for Dick had opened his mouth to speak, and then seemed to hesitate. Receiving encouragement from the Bursar's manner, he now unburdened his soul.

"But, I say, about Mr Lewis and his clothes, you know," taking the Bursar as it were into his confidence. "Couldn't I do anything? He will never be able to put on any of that suit again. What am I to do?"

If the Bursar felt in his heart of hearts that the College would not suffer materially even if Lewis's clothes, which were not of a very high order of merit, had been irretrievably damaged, for the moment the sense of the ludicrous so entirely predominated that, immensely tickled by the young man's evident anxiety, he could not resist the temptation of drawing him on.

"Ah, well, yes, to be sure, that is a question to be considered," he said with forced gravity. "What would you suggest, Mr Loder?"

Mr Loder, who was very, very young in some ways, rose to the bait at once, and blossomed out into suggestion after suggestion, while the Bursar, who could hardly trust himself to speak, maintained a sphinx-like demeanour, nodding his head at intervals, and registering all these things in his heart for future reproduction. Finally the two parted upon most excellent terms, though without arriving at any distinct understanding about the matter at issue; and although the subject was never brought up again, the confidential relations between them so far continued to exist that the young man never failed to cap the Bursar if he met him in the quadrangle, and the Bursar, who could be terribly short-sighted on occasions, never failed to acknowledge the salute with a smile of recognition to Mr Loder and an inward chuckle to himself.

"Not like the Bursar!" Dick would say; "why, he is the most awfully decent old chap."

And the Bursar kept all these things in his memory, and now and again told the story in his own quaint way to some particularly favoured acquaintance, and — what was perhaps more to Dick's advantage — always had a kindly feeling for the guileless youth who had afforded him some excellent entertainment.

Having thus briefly sketched Mr Loder's college career so far as it had gone, we may leave that gentleman calmly sleeping.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COMMON-ROOM.

"For this and all other mercies!" piously ejaculated the Bursar as he assumed his place in the big arm-chair on the left-hand side of the fireplace, and at once proceeded to break a captain's biscuit into small square pieces.

"And for what mercy in particular to-night?" inquired Ingram, who, having insisted upon M'Gregor taking the place of honour next to the Bursar, was now seated on the far side of Tom next to Lewis, who, occupying the opposite corner to the Bursar, completed the party.

"Select circle, no Carr, for instance," growled the Bursar. Tom at once pricked up his ears and smiled quietly with a half glance at Ingram, who, being at the moment occupied in helping himself to the port which the Bursar had just passed to him, failed to catch Tom's eye.

"Carr?" said the last-named gentleman,—"what Carr? Not Carr of Balliol by any chance?" The Bursar nodded. "Why, I knew him fairly well once upon a time, and I used not to think that he was a bad sort of fellow. Rather superior, of course. But how comes he to be here? I thought that politics were more in his line."

The Bursar noted each point of these remarks, and now replied to them in detail.

"Oh, you knew him, did you? I should not have given him

credit for so respectable an acquaintance. Superior you call him? He must have degenerated since you knew him, then. I call him a very inferior animal of the puppy tribe. And why did he come here? because he wasn't wanted, of course. I would gladly pay the expenses of a contested election for him, if he would go in for politics. Politics killed Pitt—at a comparatively early age."

Having thus delivered himself, and having by this time completed the demolition of the biscuit to his entire satisfaction, the Bursar selected one square, and after carefully moistening it with two or three drops of port wine, placed it on the floor, pushing it with his foot till it lay some four or five inches in front of a small hole in the wainscoting.

"How is the mouse, Bursar?" inquired Ingram, who had been watching him.

The Bursar held up his finger. "Hush, and you'll see," and after a minute of expectation out from the hole popped an exceedingly plump and well-nourished mouse, which, without trace of either shyness or indecision, at once set to work upon the biscuit, and having nibbled round the edges till it was reduced to what the little creature had by frequent practice discovered to be the proper size, it partly pushed and partly pulled the dainty morsel into the hole, and then with one glance of its bright bead-like eyes at the Bursar, and one valedictory whisk of the tail, it disappeared from view.

"By Jove! that's funny," exclaimed Tom, who had watched the little creature's proceedings with the keenest interest. "Is it always the same mouse?"

"I think so," said the Bursar; "I believe it to be a confirmed old bachelor like myself,—at any rate it has never had the presumption to introduce a family. It's getting ancient, too, and infirm, or should be so. I have fed it for ten years or more, and now I moisten the biscuit for it, as its teeth ought to be going if they're not. Good judge of wine, too—a good deal better than Carr. I tried to pass off a bit with

sherry one night, and the little beast just smelt it, and then sat up on its hind legs, and stroked its whiskers, and made faces at me till I gave it the right stuff."

"It's a queer thing, is it not," observed Ingram in his quiet way, "how often you will find, even in the hardest heart, a soft corner for animals? Now I have been told that more than one notorious criminal——"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the Bursar sharply. "You did not come up here to tell us anecdotes except about yourself. Now, young man, own up at once and tell us plenty about yourself. What sort of a squire do you make, how do you like it, and how do you get on with your parson? You young fellows go off into the world and leave the old fossils like me behind you, and we never seem to hear anything about you. I will forgive you, Tom; you've been round the world, and I think you did write to me once; but Ingram, there, has behaved too abominably. Out of sight, out of mind."

"Never that, you dear old fellow," exclaimed Ingram warmly. "I will own that I am the worst correspondent in the world, but the old man always reports of you to Daisy. I'll try to give an account of myself. But what is it you want to know?"

"What sort of a squire you make, how you get on with your parson, and everything," repeated the Bursar.

"One question at a time, please," said Ingram, laughing. "What sort of squire do I make? Well, I don't make a squire at all. Somebody else made me," and he sighed, "and I—well, I accepted the position. Shall I say pretty good, not altogether satisfactory at the start, but now perhaps moderately good, or at any rate improving?"

"An equivocal answer," pronounced the Bursar with decision. "Improving yourself or improving other people? We can't take the word improving by itself, eh, Tom?"

"Certainly not," assented Tom, infinitely pleased at the turn which the conversation was taking. Ingram's ways were so entirely unconventional and so wholly different to the ways of

other people that Tom, who had only paid one visit to Elmscroft since Ingram's marriage, was even more curious than the Bursar to hear a more full account of the late don's country life.

"You have again put two questions into one, Bursar, and that is hardly fair dealing. A little of both, though, I will say."

"How do the other people improve you?"

The question was put in the same form by the Bursar and Tom simultaneously.

Ingram laughed.

"What a unanimous thirst for knowledge!" he exclaimed. "In many ways: they teach me common-sense and the poor man's political views, and in return I try to instruct them in the art of euphuism, and we illustrate our lessons."

"What are your folk principally?"

"Cobblers, Radicals most of them, hard swearers. I tell them that I don't mind their politics, but I did draw the line at their language. And most of them have mended their ways because—well, do you know, I flatter myself because they like my sitting down and having a chat with them. It is a dull life that of a cobbler, and my company is better than none. One man, a fine old fellow too in many ways, was a terribly hard nut to crack, but I beat him fairly at his own game at last, and since then his language has become really tolerable."

"Do you mean you outswore him?" inquired Tom, laughing.

"No, no, not exactly; I couldn't, you know. I have not got the Bursar's power of metaphor. Nor did I drink up eisel, or even eat crocodiles, but I had him fairly on the hip all the same. 'It's natur, natur, sir,' he said; 'and natur is what a chap has been brought up upon.' I let that statement pass, as I did not feel called upon to explain to him that he was confusing first with second nature. 'Now, I were brought up upon swearing,' he said, 'and I couldn't no more go for a day, no, nor yet an hour, without here a swear and there a swear, not no more than you could finish off that shoe.'

'Hand the shoe over,' I said, and I finished it off in ten minutes."

"How like you, Ingram, and what a sell for the man," and for a minute the Common-room echoed with Tom's laughter.

"Hold your row for goodness' sake, man," exclaimed the Bursar testily, anxious for the finale of the story. "Go on, Ingram; what did the fellow say?"

"Well, I'm sorry to relate that when he had looked the shoe up and looked it down, and examined my stitches, he said, 'Well, I'm d—d!' But you know that was a very mild way of expressing his feelings. I have heard the Bursar of St Hilary's say that, and I don't believe that he has improved a bit. Now my cobbler has improved."

"You leave the Bursar alone," said that individual quite gravely. "Tom, here, and I do not want to hear anything about ourselves. We are conducting a cross-examination of one Ingram. Now go on, there is a good fellow: I like to hear you talk, and heaven knows I don't often get a chance now. Make the fellow talk, Tom."

"Tell us about your work in the place; how many classes have you got?" obediently inquired M'Gregor.

"Only just here a one and there a one, as our people say," admitted Ingram. "Village life does not render itself very easily to classes; there is really hardly any time for them. One has to get at the people by visiting them in their own houses. I have got a night-school in the winter and spring months, and that wanted a little managing. We are blessed with a board school, and the board schoolmaster, having a sort of prescriptive right to set up a night-school, claimed a monopoly. He threatened me with the Education Department, but I pointed out to him that as I was not paid for teaching, I could do what I liked. Then he appealed *ad misericordiam*, saying that I was taking the bread out of a poor man's mouth, &c., &c., &c., and I really saw that he had reason; so we even compromised the matter. I gave him the few pounds which

he earned on an average, and he gave me a free hand. And now he has by degrees arrived at such a stage of amiability that he comes and helps me free, gratis, and for nothing on occasion, and would come much oftener if I did not rather discourage him. An amateur like myself has a different system of education to that of an expert."

"I think we may pass that statement," remarked Tom, appealing to the Bursar, who nodded approval. "Now, what was the next question? Oh, about the parson—how do you and he hit it off together, Ingram?"

"Excellently well: he is a very worthy man, a great local pillar of the Church, a D.D., Canon—Minor Canon of course, but his sister insists on the canon—a Rural Dean I know, Surrogate I suppose, and what not besides; a good fellow very, a little bit under female influence, but of course all that comes under the heading of wholesome discipline. Besides, it is always comforting to have somebody to assert your position for you if you don't care to insist upon it too strongly yourself."

"Who is the lady?" inquired the Bursar; "Mrs Rector, Rural Dean, and Surrogate?"

"No, no miss, not his wife, he is a celibate, but his sister; a very excellent woman too, full of good works and narrow-mindedness, as so many of those very excellent people so often are. We did not quite hit off together at first,—in fact she imparted to Daisy her suspicions that I was not altogether orthodox, and I fancy that there was a bit of a skirmish. She fired off at Daisy's head all her brother's dignities, and I am afraid that Daisy was unkind enough to tell her that anybody could be a D.D. who chose to pay for that high privilege, and that her own father belonged to that illustrious order, but did not make quite such a fuss about it. I fancy it all ended in the usual way—plenty of tears and kisses."

"I can fancy Daisy taking up the cudgels," remarked the Bursar, smiling grimly at the recollection of certain passages of arms that had occurred between himself and Mrs Ingram in

her very early days; "but why were you supposed to be unorthodox?"

"A case of 'noscitur a sociis,'" answered Ingram, laughing. "I was supposed to keep bad company. I happened to meet an old lady toiling up our hill one hot day with a pail of water far too heavy for her, so I even played Jack to her Jill without, fortunately, the mythical unhappy result, and carried the pail for her. By ill luck we met the rectoress, and of course I put down my pail, took off my hat, and prepared to pass the time of the day; but she both elected to pass by on the other side at the time, and was obviously curt on the next occasion when I met her. And presently it turned out that my dear Jill, really a most entertaining old lady, was what that other lady was pleased to call a most disreputable character. Wherein, I inquired, lay her offending? She was, if you please, not only a Dissenter herself, but the legitimate mother, grandmother, and it may have been great-grandmother, of a whole tribe of Dissenters. I ventured to remark that the circumstance did not make the pail any lighter, and that people who were not Dissenters had been known to become grandmothers. It ended in our getting into a regular theological discussion. Upstairs and downstairs the good lady wandered, backwards and forwards—Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics, the Canon, poor old Jill, and myself, all mingled in one delicious confusion. But I stuck to my point and vowed that even if my old friend was a fire-worshipper or a Samaritan or had a devil, the weight of that bucket was the material point after all. At last we dropped theology by mutual consent, and up started a new grievance. Jill was a hopelessly wicked old woman, because she smoked forsooth. So did I smoke, I said. The Canon didn't smoke. Perhaps it made him sick, I suggested; it had made me sick once. Oh, dear no; the Canon could do anything, if he wanted to, better than most people, but smoking was such a very nasty habit. Then there were a lot of very nasty people about, but I could not see that the nastiness of smoking made that bucket any lighter. Oh, dear!

I was perfectly incorrigible: the Canon must come and talk to me. I said I was always glad to see the Canon at any time, but that neither canon, bishop, nor even the Pope of Rome, should stop me from carrying an old woman's bucket. I need hardly say the Canon never came, but what was much more startling was that old Jill—capital good company she is!—took to coming to church, and now I have the whole credit of her conversion, and expect to be canonised myself. Perhaps another reason why I am in favour now at the Rectory is because our good Bishop saw fit, or found it convenient, to give me the light of his countenance."

Here the speaker paused, but the Bursar, who had been chuckling to himself as he pictured the very calm and equable-tempered Ingram engaged in a theological controversy with an illogical and excitable female, insisted on having the rest of the story.

"Go on," he said, "about the Bishop."

"Well," resumed Ingram, "the Bishop is an old friend of my old ally Ridley—our Ridley, Tom. There was some delay about his consecration, and he wanted to have a look at the neighbourhood quietly, and it was arranged that he should come and stop for a night with us, travelling, as you might say, incognito. Well, I thought it out and came to the conclusion that it would be only fair to give our good Rector the chance of shaking hands with the incoming Diocesan. And then the worthy man had his scruples, and pleaded that the same privilege might be accorded to some of his brother clergy, and the matter finally resolved itself into a sort of informal garden-party, three o'clock to six, the Bishop having to leave at five. We three—the Bishop, Daisy, and myself—were just finishing lunch when Bertie Treherne rode over. Well, I thought he understood it was the Bishop, but he apparently never took it in, as good my lord was as yet in plain clothes. However, they got on very well together. I left them alone in the dining-room for a few minutes, and when I came back they had disappeared, and I supposed that

Bertie had taken the Bishop into the garden, and thought no more about it till three o'clock came. In flocked the eagles, and, lo! no carcass. Bishop and Bertie had hopelessly disappeared. So at last I organised a search party, and in a very remote corner of the grounds, where there is an old bowling-green quite shut in by yew hedges, I thought that I heard voices. The Rector and two other parsons were with me, and when we walked round the corner, there were Bertie and the Bishop both with their coats off and bare-headed, laughing and chattering and doing their best to bring the Bishop's hat back to some sort of shape. It appeared that they had walked that way after lunch, and as they liked the look of the place, Bertie had managed to hunt up some old bowls, and they had been playing for more than an hour, using their hats for jacks. They had won one game each, and when the Bishop was game-ball, or whatever you call it, in the deciding game, he had put one bowl quite close to the hat,—'So I went for the lot,' said Bertie, 'for all I was worth, and blessed if I didn't do the hat-trick!'

"I introduced the Rector as the Bishop was putting on his coat, and Bertie's face was a study. 'Great Scot!' he said, 'you don't mean to say you are the Bishop?'

"'Not quite officially yet, Mr Treherne; I am only half-fledged.'

"'Oh, then I needn't bother any more about the hat. It's not the right article at all,' said Bertie.

"The bishop told me when he went away that he had never enjoyed an afternoon more in his life—till the parsons came—and that Bertie had promised to come and play a return match at the palace when they settled in. And now I believe that his only regret is that he cannot have Bertie for his private chaplain.

"Anyhow, that day clinched my business, and I believe that ever since I have been supposed to be very much orthodox.

"And that is my last word about myself to-night; so just

you talk to your guest, Bursar, and I'll help Lewis to do that problem which he has been frowning over the last half hour in the corner."

While Ingram talked to Lewis, who, truth to say, having few interests in matters that came beyond the scope of mathematical science or Common-room existence, had been half-asleep, Tom plied the Bursar with questions as to the present state of the College.

"What sort of men in College now?" said the Bursar, repeating Tom's question; "much about the same as usual—not better certainly, probably worse—the usual amount of non-entities, a few knaves, and some fools—in fact, judging from the schools, I fancy that the last element predominates even more than usual."

"Not a very bright lot of scholars, then," suggested Tom, who was a supporter of the theory that on the shoulders of the favoured few who wore a scholar's gown rested the whole responsibility of providing that St Hilary's should be properly represented in the class-lists.

"Very so-so, very moderate indeed. I don't know whether they are only stupid or idle as well. Or perhaps they don't get much good out of Carr. I know I shouldn't, and it certainly was a coincidence that the only one of the whole batch who did get a first in the summer had washed his hands of Carr, or it may have been the other way up. Anyhow, he got his class, and Carr did not like it a bit."

"I rather liked the look of the fellow who said grace. He had a nice face."

"More than most of them have," growled the Bursar; "they are a fiddle-headed crew. The fellow who said grace? Who did say grace, by the way? Why, that was the very man, young Loder."

"Loder," exclaimed Tom, "Loder. By Jove! that's the boy Bertie Treherne wrote to me about, and I promised to look him up. I am glad I liked his looks anyhow. What sort of a fellow is he?"

"Well," said the Bursar, after a momentary reflection, "there are people about who say that he belongs to the knaves' brigade, but I don't know much about it myself. Anyhow, the lad is no fool; he got a first and he cut Carr's lectures, two points in his favour. But if you really want to know all about him," and a twinkle of malicious humour came into the Bursar's eyes, "ask Lewis there. Mr Loder happens to be a particular friend of Lewis's."

While the Bursar for the next minute or so was absorbed in the delicate operation of peeling a large apple, which, as he never by any chance ate an apple, might be accounted as a work of supererogation, Tom, watching his opportunity, accosted Lewis, who had been talking to Ingram.

"Can you tell me anything about young Loder, Mr Lewis? I hear that he is a particular friend of yours."

"Who? what?" exclaimed Lewis. "Loder a particular friend of mine! What do you mean, sir? how dare you? Most pernicious young scoundrel;" and in his indignation the mathematician swallowed half a glass of port with such reckless haste that part of it went the wrong way, and he went on for some time coughing, choking, and spluttering, while Tom—immediate though innocent cause of the disorder—was left in a state of doubt as to whether the pernicious young scoundrel was Dick Loder or himself, and of wonderment as to the reason for the sudden ebullition.

"I should almost have thought, my dear Lewis," observed the Bursar, "that the mathematical precision of aim and the fine calculation of angle would have commended themselves to your favourable notice. I had always been under the impression that in the pursuit of science any small temporary inconveniences were amply compensated for if the general result of the experiment—oh, you are not going, surely!"

For at this moment Lewis, having no particular desire to listen to the story of his disaster as retailed by the Bursar, muttered something under his breath, and hastily rising from his chair, left the Common-room.

The other two men naturally looked at the Bursar, anticipating some explanation of Lewis's extraordinary proceedings.

"Well," said that gentleman, putting down the apple, in which he now seemed to take no further interest, "this is what I call a really comfortable party. The worthy Lewis has his good points, I admit, but he is very poor company at the best of times, and he doesn't drink his liquor like a gentleman. And now that he is gone"—he rang the bell as he spoke—"I will just give you two fellows a real treat, a bottle of port, of which I bought the only three dozen left at old George Grubb's sale. We have drunk seven or eight bottles already, and I mean to keep the rest for high days and holidays, of which I call this one. John," this to the servant, who had now appeared, "clean glasses, please, and that bottle of port I told you to decant—oh, you've got them, have you? There, Tom, my boy! Did you ever see colour like that? and I can swear the wine has been thirty odd years in bottle, because old George Grubb laid it down in my father's lifetime, and he died when I was an undergraduate." As he spoke he filled his glass and held it up to the light for M'Gregor's benefit.

"But I say, about Lewis," exclaimed Tom, who was thirsting for an explanation much more than for the wine. "What was the matter with him? Did I say quite the wrong thing? Anyhow you put me up to it."

"You said quite the right thing, my good fellow, and with the happiest results—at any rate you got rid of Lewis. Good wine is thrown away upon him, like good company. And now I'll tell you the story," and with that he gave them a full and true account of Dick Loder's snowballing performances, and his own subsequent conversation with the young man.

"Upon my honour," he concluded, "it was with the greatest difficulty that I kept my countenance at all. The young gentleman was so very childlike and bland in his offers—all made in pure good faith too, mark you. Would Mr Lewis go to his own tailor and order a suit of clothes at Mr Loder's expense? Or Mr Loder's own tailor was a very good man, and if Mr

Lewis would only trouble to look over a selection of patterns, he need not even bother himself to be measured. Of course Mr Loder's tailor was not in the habit of doing such a thing, but just this once, for he was a very sensible as well as obliging fellow—'awfully decent' was the expression used—Mr Loder had no doubt that he would stretch a point this once and copy an old suit. Of course I took it all quite seriously, and as the young gentleman seemed to have a very pretty taste in clothes —a sort of thing with a good big reddish check he was wearing—I suggested that he should even go one step farther and choose the pattern himself. I could fancy the worthy Lewis trotting about the quadrangle in a suit of dittos after Mr Loder's own heart."

"But how did it all end?" inquired Tom, who had been laughing till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I compromised the matter. I told the young man that perhaps he had better wait till I had sounded Mr Lewis on the matter, and that till he heard from me again he had better take no further steps except perhaps to have a pattern or two in readiness. For the rest of the term I could see that he was most anxious to renew the conversation whenever I met him in the quadrangle, but I am devilish short-sighted, as you know, so he never got his opening; and I fancy that he had an accident of some sort in the vacation, and probably that put it out of his head."

"But I say, sir," exclaimed Tom, wiping his eyes, "it was a bit rough to turn me on to Lewis like that."

"Well, you wanted information," said the Bursar, "and Lewis was not in the least amusing. Besides, I was not going to throw away such a pearl as old George Grubb's port on—well, on Lewis. Any stick is good enough to beat—d—n the proverb, my memory is going. Talk about something else, somebody," and with that the Bursar helped himself to his second glass of the treasured port, and as no one immediately responded to his invitation, for a few minutes there was silence in the room.

"Then you can't tell me anything about Loder yourself?" inquired Tom at last, as he saw that Ingram had lapsed into one of his silent fits.

"Well, I don't know that I can tell you much more than that he throws, or used to throw, a snowball with considerable violence, and that Providence must watch over fools—I don't mean Mr Loder, I mean the other fools—if he is not indicted for homicide one of these days,—justifiable homicide I should call it if he killed some people, your friend Carr to wit, Tom. And he is a very open-handed young man, and has sweetly innocent ideas and charming manners. Indeed I believe myself that the lad is a good lad enough if he were only properly managed, but——"

"Why don't you manage him yourself?" suddenly interrupted Ingram, waking from his reverie.

"I manage him!" exclaimed the Bursar; "what sort of fellow am I to manage a pack of lively boys?—not that many of them are very lively. Besides, it is the Dean's business—it's the Dean who does, or thinks he does, the managing."

"Or the mismanaging in this case," said Ingram. "Poor dear old man," he went on, sighing as he spoke, "with all the best intentions in the world, with as kind a heart as ever beat, but, oh! in the ways of young men often so short-sighted. A few chapels missed, too much out-college society, a little harmless ebullition of spirits, some misfortune in the schools, and the best fellow in the world may stand in the Dean's books hopelessly condemned, while some absolute nonentity with precise manners, a smooth tongue, and a wholly aggravating measure of punctuality is promoted to be an angel. How well I remember it all when I was an undergraduate! I never told you, Tom, did I, how one worthy Canon entertained grave doubts as to my morality simply and solely on the ground that I declined to go to his tea-fights, and when I told him the true reason, which was because muffins—I didn't even add insipid conversation—invariably disagreed with me, he

said that he had a good mind to report me to the Dean for personally insulting him?"

"He wanted to manage you, perhaps," said the Bursar, with a sly look at Tom.

"Perhaps so," assented Ingram. "I am quite ready to plead guilty to being cantankerous myself, but it does not at all follow that all these young fellows are equally cantankerous. From your own account, my dear Bursar, this young Loder can hardly be set down as cantankerous. Why don't you take him in hand by way of a new departure, Bursar, or why doesn't somebody? Why does everybody sit down and fold their hands, and watch a young fellow going to the bad without making an effort to save him?"

There was so much feeling in the speaker's voice, such an accent of plaintive entreaty, that the Bursar now dropped his jesting manner and prepared to treat the subject quite seriously. Having a deep and sincere affection for his former colleague, and a strong belief that any difficulty upon which Ingram chose to bring his brilliant intellect to bear was capable of mitigation, if not of final solution, and having for some time past cherished a suspicion that the tone of the College had not in these latter days been entirely satisfactory, he was prepared to welcome any suggestions coming from a source of which he knew the inspirations to be sound and healthy. Back to his mind came surging in full flood a tide of recollections. He thought of George Ronald standing in that very room, calmly defying the collective wisdom of the College Senate assembled in full conclave, of the attitude that Ingram had taken up on that occasion, and of the quiet insistence with which he had fairly carried his point and saved the College, and indirectly himself, from making a signal and fatal blunder. "I wonder," he said to himself as he opened his watch and looked fondly at George's photograph, "whether he would have been alive now if we had let him go that day;" and then he closed the watch with a snap as the thought occurred to him that, even if George had lived, he would have gone back

to his own land with blighted hopes and soured thoughts, laying the burden of his disappointment at the doors of the Bursar of St Hilary's.

"No, he wouldn't though,—he didn't know what malice was;" and so saying, the Bursar was suddenly conscious that he had spoken aloud, and looking at the faces of his companions, was at the same time aware that they had divined the direction in which his thoughts had been wandering.

"I beg your pardon, you fellows," he said gruffly, "but it does come back at times. But to get back to our sheep: you fellow Ingram there, you who came back to lecture us—what the devil you ever wanted to go away for no one knows—I say that you yourself never to my knowledge, except on one occasion, or shall I say in two cases? for I'll make you a present of this young globe-trotter"—laying his hand on Tom's knee as he spoke—"I say that you never stirred yourself to manage the undergraduate."

It was a home-thrust, and Tom M'Gregor, who had been on the point of levelling the very same accusation against Ingram, awaited the latter's answer with some curiosity.

"I admit the justice of the indictment, my dear Bursar," said Ingram, smiling as he spoke, "and I throw myself on the mercy of the court. But you will pardon my observing that the *argumentum ad hominem* is a very faulty form of argument, and that the shortcomings or incompetence of one individual in no way affects the main issue. However, I will tell you that, conscious of lacking the power and the opportunity, I will plead guilty to lacking even the inclination. To a certain extent, no doubt, the personal conviction of disability contributes to the want of will. You may tell a child that where there is a will there is always a way, but you shall hardly expect the reasoning man to believe you."

"And why, pray, was the power or the opportunity missing in your case?" inquired the Bursar.

"Well, look at my position, and look at the wretched man himself such as he is," laughed Ingram. "I was elected to a

fellowship here, partly, we will imagine, because I had a certain past in what is, to our present purpose, a very immaterial line to recommend me; partly because the College entertained the idea that I might be able to communicate some of my own knowledge of the aforesaid—for our purpose immaterial—line to a very limited circle, but certainly with no understanding, either expressed or implied, that I should become a manager of young men. I found, in fact, that the ethics of the College were under the control of an older man than myself, a man for whom I had and must always have the highest esteem and respect, our dearly loved and very worthy Dean. I shortly concluded that he was jealous, perhaps rightly jealous, of his position, and although he was kind enough on occasions to take me into his confidence, and even to ask my advice, finding that he regarded as essential matters which I looked upon as trivial points of detail, it would have been impertinence on my part, if not presumption, to run counter to his convictions and speak my mind freely—something worse than presumption to attempt to undermine his authority. And so I gave to the College that time and that amount of teaching which I conceived it to be my duty to give, and gradually created a sphere of work for myself outside the walls.

"So much, then, for the opportunity and the position, and now for the man. What sort of personality have I got, may I ask, to influence—for if you are to manage you must influence—a set of young men who have been brought up to believe that playing cricket with a straight bat or feathering an oar correctly are more essential points than either writing grammatical prose or living in charity with all men? 'You can't teach us this,' they argue to themselves; 'why should you be able to teach us that?'—I don't mean the prose so much as the other thing. 'If I have got a mote in my eye you have got a beam in yours. Go back to school, my good fool, and learn to play with a straight bat or prove to us that you can jump twenty-three feet, and then come back to us and we will listen to what you have got to say about the other matter.'

Two-thirds of our young men in these so-called seats of learning are either wholly or partially given up to idolatry and hero-worship, and it is not the Hertford scholar who is their hero, but the 'Varsity oar. And indeed my own small experience of the manners and habits of those heroes has taught me that there are those among them who, tempering their brute strength with kindliness, are truly lovable characters. Your Derby winner is the finest brute in creation if you add a few other qualities to speed. I won't say that now and again you will not find an exceptional man, who, without any position of advantage from an athletic point of view, commands the admiration and attention of these young men. But those you may count on your fingers' ends, and I have no pretensions to be one of them. Now, you Bursar, in your day, and you Tom, only a year or two back, were as gods to all intents and purposes, while I was a very ordinary mortal."

"I am afraid there is not much divinity about me, my good Ingram. But suppose that we agree to let him off on that charge," said Tom, appealing to the Bursar, "we have still got to hear his excuse for the want of inclination. I thought, or should have thought, from your performances, that you were born to educate, Ingram."

"I don't know about being born, but I do know that I dearly love experiments in moral education," answered Ingram.

"Then why the deuce didn't you morally educate us here?" exclaimed the Bursar.

Ingram sighed wearily.

"I don't know exactly," he said, "but I wish you two would not make me talk quite so much. Why won't some other gentleman take the floor, as they say? Let us change the subject, at all events. This is fairly good wine, Bursar — a blend, I suppose."

"Blend! Heaven help the man!" exclaimed the Bursar, horror-struck at the suggestion. "Come, come, Ingram, you want educating yourself, man; I really did give you credit for some taste. It is a very pure vintage wine."

"Dear me, what a mistake I have made! But surely, Bursar, there are blended wines as good as any vintage."

"Some fools say so, I believe," grunted the Bursar; "but there is as much difference between a good vintage and the very best blend as there is between——" In default of a better metaphor ready to hand, the Bursar was on the point of producing those good old servants "chalk and cheese," when Ingram very quietly finished the sentence for him.

"Between the undergraduate, who is the most distinctly blended thing I know, and the street arab, who has never had the chance of being educated out of all resemblance to the original animal. There is one reason, then, why I never seemed to find myself anxious to interfere with the undergraduate's ethics; and if you want another reason, there seemed to me to be a want of continuity in the work, and it was likely that any impression made here on a plastic substance, already full of impressions made elsewhere, would prove very evanescent."

"We don't seem to have got much more forward in the matter of young Loder after all, do we?" suggested Tom, going back to the original subject of the discussion.

"Why don't you take him in hand yourself? You say that you want to make his acquaintance; you are going to be up for two or three weeks without too much to do, and you are just the right man to speak a word of reason, which he, being, as I suppose him to be, a hero-worshipper, will be likely to accept."

Tom looked not a little startled at this suggestion made by Ingram. It had most certainly never occurred to him when he had consented to come up and take the 'Varsity boat till it went to Putney, that he would be called upon to act as Mentor to any one or more recalcitrant members of his own College.

"I am afraid that I am hardly qualified for the post of bear-leader, Ingram," he said, laughing.

"And why the dickens shouldn't you be qualified?" struck in the Bursar, on whom Ingram's remarks on the amount of importance that attached itself to the heroes of the river had

been by no means thrown away. "I wish to goodness we could give you some official position here — fellowship, or rangership, or something. Things seem to go to the devil now that your lot have gone. Can't you stay up for the term, man, and give young Chetwynde a hand with the torpid and start an eight for them? You say you are not going on to Putney, eh?"

Tom hesitated, and there is a very true proverb anent hesitation.

"Well, I don't know," he said doubtfully. "I have got no particular engagement, but if I went and shoved my oar into other matters, the Dean——"

"Who wants you to shove your oar in?" interrupted the Bursar; "we want your tongue: not that we shouldn't like the oar too, if that could teach other fellows to shove their oar in properly, and"—just then the thought of the obnoxious Carr would obtrude itself—"to hold their superior tongues."

"And as for the Dean," added Ingram, "when I went to see him before Hall I found him almost with tears of joy in his eyes because one Tom M'Gregor had come up to take his Master's, and was, he heard, going to stay up for a fortnight. You will get a pretty free hand there, Tom, and the more so because you won't be hampered by the official position with which this obstinate old man would like to saddle you. You will be *amicus curiæ*, an amateur instead of a professional educator, and you can keep Carr in proper subjection."

Before Tom M'Gregor left the Common-room that night he had pledged himself to stay up till the end of the next term, and keep an eye not only on the College torpid, but also on the proper bearing of the young men, and more particularly on the young man Richard Loder.

"I'll get him to come and dine some night," he observed.

"If I said Monday, won't you stretch a point and come, Ingram?"

"I wish I could with all my heart," was the answer. "I have a vivid recollection of my first dinner with you, you

remember, don't you?" Tom simply nodded. "But I must be off early on Monday, as there is a social function at home that day and I must be there."

"Well, I'll ask Loder, anyhow," said Tom.

"That's right," exclaimed the Bursar cheerily; "feed the beast!"

CHAPTER X.

IN KING EDWARD STREET.

In happy unconsciousness that his entertainer was regarding him in the light of a healthy subject for experiment, in blissful ignorance that three men of the world—two of them entire strangers—had been laying plans for his benefit, Dick Loder had eaten an uncommonly good dinner, and was thoroughly enjoying his evening with M'Gregor. As Bertie Treherne was a sort of connecting-link between the two, that volatile young gentleman's personal appearance and character had been discussed at considerable length, and the verdict had been distinctly favourable.

"He is such a thorough little gentleman," observed Tom, as they drew their chairs to the fire. "Not that he is very little now though, by the way. But I knew him when he was at Eton. He is the sort of fellow whose manners carry him through with every one. The old Dean vows there is no one like him."

"The deuce he does!" exclaimed Dick; "I shouldn't have thought he was at all the sort of fellow the Dean would care about. The Dean is such a dreadful old stick. Oh, by Jove! I hope I haven't said the wrong thing. I quite forgot that the Dean might be a friend of yours," and he looked rather anxiously at his host.

"Well, yes, he is a friend of mine as it happens," said Tom—

"a very dear friend, too. But I don't know that 'old stick' is a very abusive term. I use it myself pretty often, and it don't mean much to me. But what is wrong with the Dean? Have you and he been coming to loggerheads?"

"We have not been coming, we have come, we are there, we live at loggerheads—in fact, I think, we started there," confessed Dick, laughing, and with a little encouragement from M'Gregor he went on to give a full and fairly accurate account of his many quarrels, not only with the Dean, but with sundry other people in authority. Tom shouted with laughing over the story of the fracas with Carr, and treated that little grievance of Lewis's as an excellent joke, though he had heard the whole story even better told before. But on the subject of the Dean he fairly joined issue with his guest, telling him a few plain truths, which caused the young gentleman first to wonder, then to doubt, and finally to look not a little foolish.

"Carr is an ass," Tom pronounced with decision. "Perhaps it is a pity that you quarrelled with him, as I don't much hold with quarrelling myself, but Carr is an ass all the same, though I do not believe that he is a bad fellow at bottom. Lewis is a crusty bit of goods, but honest. If you leave him alone, he will leave you alone, but you must not expect a man to be best pleased when you have done your best to spoil his temper and his clothes. But the Dean, we can't have you quarrelling with the Dean. It is like hitting a woman or shooting a sitting hen to be at loggerheads with as good and kind-hearted an old man as ever stepped. Of course it is all nonsense about out-college friends, but it is part of the old man's creed to believe that all the good men in Oxford congregate in St Hilary's. I wish they did, but they don't; still it is a comfortable idea for an old man with his heart and soul in the good of the College to think that they do. But come now, how about those chapels. What did he say when you told him that you had broken your arm? He must have said something."

"He never said a word. I don't think that I told him that I had broken my arm in so many words, but of course he

must have seen that I was smashed when I had my arm in a sling."

"Must have seen it! Never told him! Pray, how the devil did you expect him to see it?" exclaimed Tom.

"Why, anybody with half an eye must have seen that I had my arm in a sling," reiterated the other.

"Anybody with half an eye!" repeated Tom in high disdain; "why, man alive, the Dean hasn't got half an eye, or a quarter either. I give you my word of honour that the poor old man has not seen beyond the end of his nose, or at any rate the end of his spoon and fork, for the last six years. He is as blind as a bat and as unobservant as—as the devil." His Satanic Majesty was so evidently invoked in default of a better example, that Tom, having so invoked him, pulled up short, and the two men burst out laughing in company.

"Odd thing one has to fall back on the devil, though from all accounts he is the last party to be unobservant," said Tom, by way of apology to Dick Loder and the devil at the same time; and having thus made the *amende honorable* to the latter for apparently misjudging him, he took up his parable again and made a few points clearer to the former.

"Now, don't you go and make any mistake about it, Loder; I am talking about things that I know and a man I know, and I tell you that there is not a more kind-hearted and gentle old man living than the Dean, and I can't have you quarrelling with him. He is just as good as he is unobservant, and we both know," smiling as he spoke, "how much that is. I can only tell you that the very best fellow we ever had in St Hilary's, or in Oxford either for the matter of that, George Ronald, swore by the Dean, and the Dean swore by him. Of course here there has been a misunderstanding all through, and you will allow me to say that you misunderstood the Dean at least as much as he misunderstood you. If he seemed to make no allowance for your having had an accident, you made no allowance for his blindness, which prevented his seeing that you were crippled. And then probably you got your back

up, which I will bet he did not, and then came ructions. However, we'll put that right very shortly. You may kick Carr, and snowball Lewis round the quad, for all I care, but I am not going to have you quarrelling with my Dean."

A misplaced or inappropriate expression has occasionally been known to produce unexpected results, and it is a curious fact that from the moment that Tom M'Gregor claimed so strong a personal interest in the Dean of St Hilary's as even to speak of that official as if he were his own personal property, Dick Loder, who at this early age of acquaintanceship had arrived at the conclusion that his host was a thoroughly sound fellow, did then and there make up his mind that there must be undiscovered merits about the Dean which had as completely escaped his notice as the fact of his having broken his arm had evidently escaped the Dean. The upshot of this conversation, it may by anticipation be said, was that two days later the Dean, having in the interim been visited by Tom M'Gregor, and by that gentleman put into possession of certain facts and circumstances hitherto unknown to him, indited to Dick Loder so frank and kindly a letter of apology that the young scholar hardly knew how to answer it. And one expression in particular, "You will pardon an old man's blindness," not only confirmed the recipient's opinion of the soundness of M'Gregor's reasoning, but having about it a slight ring of pathos as well as of truth, had such an effect upon Dick that, albeit seldom given to use strong language, he fairly astonished Chetwynde, who was breakfasting in his room at the time, by suddenly exclaiming, "Well, I have made a pretty good d—d fool of myself."

"Try another, old chap," responded Chetwynde, who, being at the moment buried in the 'Sportsman,' jumped to the rash conclusion that Dick must have tackled a more than usually bad egg by mistake.

Later on, when Chetwynde strolled off to a lecture, Dick spent a good hour in writing and rewriting an answer to the Dean, and finally, not entirely satisfied that his own composition on the occasion came up to the necessary standard, he

carried off the latest revised version to Tom M'Gregor in King Edward Street, and consulted him on the matter.

"Oh! had a letter from the Dean, have you? It's not the first you've had, is it?"

There was a sharpness and directness about the question that rather took Dick by surprise.

"It is the first certainly," he replied.

"Then I'm not a liar after all;" and Tom chuckled as he saw the look of blank astonishment on Dick's face. "Don't look so startled, my dear fellow. The old man said that he had written to you a long time back to congratulate you on your first, and that you had never answered his letter; so I just took the bull by the horns and said that I would guarantee to say that you had never got the letter or you would have answered it. I said I thought you might have been silly, but I declined to believe that you could be rude to an old man."

"Of course not," answered Dick heartily, being in that state of penitence which rather welcomed than resented the implication that he had been worthy of condemnation on the score of folly. "Did he say that he had written to me about Mods? Let me see—that was months ago. Why," as a sudden thought struck him, "I went down the very day the list was out."

"Then of course the letter went down too, down the gutter I mean, or wherever things do go in the Long. I should think I had lost a dozen pipes that way, and letters by the dozen. Anything more?"

"Well, I thought I would like you to listen to this, if you don't mind," and rather shyly Dick proceeded to read out his answer to the Dean's letter. "Do you think that will do?" he inquired at the conclusion.

"Do uncommonly well to light my pipe with," exclaimed Tom bluntly, having ever had in his own mind a hearty contempt for all circuitous methods. "What the dickens is the good of writing a lot of blarney on paper? What's to hinder you from going to call on the old man and having it out with him?"

For the moment Dick looked rather disconsolate. No young author likes even the publisher's sympathetically worded statement that the composition, though meritorious in itself, is hardly suitable to our magazine.

"Well, I don't know," he said doubtfully, scratching his head; "'littera scripta manet,' don't you think?"

"I don't think anything about it," responded the unfeeling critic, "except that if that is the 'littera scripta,' you had better hand it over to me to light my pipe with as I said before, and then go and put on your cap and gown and your very best manners, mind, and see the dear old man. He has come down a peg to write to you, let me tell you, so you can afford to put your dignity in your pocket and go and say that you are sorry, and then come and lunch with me and tell me all about it."

Straight into the fire went Dick's laboured composition, and off to his own room to don his cap and gown went the young man himself.

Ten minutes after he left King Edward Street he found himself knocking at the Dean's door.

"Come in," said the Dean, and then putting on his spectacles he did his best to identify his visitor. "It's Mr, Mr——?"

"Loder, sir."

There was no lack of warmth in the greeting now. In a moment the Dean had pushed away the letter he was writing and risen from his chair.

"Mr Loder, is it? How very kind of you to come yourself. I can't say how glad I am to see you. Take a seat, Mr Loder, and stay and talk to me for a few minutes, if you can spare the time," and with that he motioned him to a chair by the fireside. And then it was that, exerting all the charm of manner that endeared him to those who knew him best, our Dean did so deal with Dick Loder that the young man was ever thereafter to be accounted as one of his warmest admirers.

As he walked back to M'Gregor's rooms to lunch an hour or

two later there was no vestige of doubt in Dick's heart as to the wisdom that his Mentor had shown in insisting upon an interview instead of the letter.

"Had it out with the Dean, Loder?" inquired Tom, who readily gathered from his visitor's face that the interview had been of a satisfactory character.

"By Jove! yes," with a sigh of intense relief, for this lad was at once impulsive and impressionable. "I am eternally obliged to you, M'Gregor, really I am. He was—well, he was positively charming to me. I think that he is quite the dearest and kindest fellow in the world. I had no idea that a Don could be half so nice. He is just one of those dear old people one feels that one would do anything for."

"What a boy he is!" thought Tom to himself, "and a nice boy too." And so thinking, he made up his mind that the position of bear-leader to Dick Loder, which had been thrust upon him by the Bursar, might not prove to be a very disagreeable diversion after all.

Aloud he said—

"I have heard other people remark that before, young man. You take my word for it, there are several what you call awfully decent people even among the dons, if you only take them properly. Of course Carr is a bit of an ass, and Lewis is a bit of a bear, but you may lay your shirt that they have their merits; only, unfortunately," he added, laughing, "you have yet got to find them out. But the Dean is simply perfect when you know him."

But a good deal of this is, as has been said, rather by way of anticipation; for in that very earliest stage of their acquaintanceship, that first of many dinners in King Edward Street, there cropped up in the course of conversation another subject upon which the host expressed some very strong opinions. Boating matters had come upon the *tapis*, the prospects of the 'Varsity Eight had been canvassed, then that very dark horse, the College torpid, had been brought under notice, and eventually Chetwynde's name was mentioned.

"Chetwynde is captain of the boat now, isn't he?" inquired Tom. "The Bursar said he was a very good fellow, and might have a look-in for the 'Varsity some day. What sort of a man is he to look at? I have hardly had time to look into College yet, but I must make his acquaintance some day. Do you know him well?"

"Chettie, oh dear yes! He is a great friend of mine—my greatest friend, in fact; he is one of our loo."

"One of your what?" exclaimed Tom, not having properly caught the last word.

"One of our loo," and then Dick went on to explain; and even as he did so, seemed to feel to himself that the explanation was growing feebler and more feeble as it proceeded, degenerating almost into an apology.

"We have a loo in College every night—of course that is not every night, but most nights—not a big loo at all, you know, but just a small party of our own. I would almost rather we played whist myself, but the other fellows don't like whist, it's too awfully scientific; and at loo, you know, you can have a bit of a flutter. It helps to pass the time after Hall."

"Oh, does it?" said M'Gregor very drily; "I didn't know it did. I never passed the time that way myself, and I should almost have thought that a fellow who had things to look after found plenty to do without wanting to have the time passed, as you call it."

"Oh, you mean Chettie. I think he looks after things all right. But the evenings are precious long, and then he plays loo with us. I don't think he cares about loo particularly any more than I do, but the other fellows seem to like it, and it is something to do, you know, after all."

"I daresay pitch-and-toss is something to do," and there was a shade of contempt in M'Gregor's tone as he spoke, "but it's a poorish game for all that. I do not happen ever to have played loo myself, but if it is only the sort of game to play for something to do, it can't be up to much. And it's hardly a game that you really play for love, is it?"

"Well, no, not for love exactly," admitted Dick; "but we don't play high—of course there is a loo occasionally and tit-ups, and so forth, but we really don't really gamble," and again he seemed to find himself drifting into the unsatisfactory situation of a man who is at once apologising for his conduct, and yet trying to persuade himself that there is nothing in it that needs an apology. Tom M'Gregor, on the other hand, in his delicate position of Mentor, had a sort of half-idea that he had driven the man he was trying to advise into a somewhat awkward corner, and that his next step must be to get him out of that corner as gently as possible, and then change a rather awkward subject of conversation at the first convenient opportunity.

"So after all," he said, laughing, "money passes as well as time. If you see a poor beggar breaking stones by the side of the road, he is passing the time, I suppose, but he expects to get something out of it too."

When talking to Lord Leuchars about his brother, Graham Loder had once remarked that Dick was "an argumentative young beggar," and now the argumentative young beggar was not prepared to concede to the point at issue at the first check.

"Well, yes," he admitted, "but there is a difference surely. Your stone-breaker is trying to earn money, but he is not prepared to stump up something for the privilege of breaking stones."

"Then he is a deuced sight more sensible than either you or Chetwynde," was the blunt answer. "You say that you only play a rotten game to pass the time, and yet you are quite willing apparently to pay for the privilege of passing the time in a way that does not amuse you;" and then, forgetting his lately formed resolution to deal gently with the young man, he suddenly came down upon Dick, as the latter afterwards described it, like a load of bricks. "It is not a matter of argument at all: yes, it is though, it is one of those silly things they used to talk about in logic—a dilemma, don't you call the thing? a creature with one stump and two tails or two

horns or something. I have got the animal all right in my head somewhere; first time in my life I ever found him come in useful though: we eat to live—no, I mean we live to eat—no, that's not it a bit, what I meant was, we play; there, that's right—we play to pass the time or we play to get the money. There now, Loder, which do you fellows do? Do you play your rotten game to win money or do you play to pass the time?"

"It's not a dilemma at all," said the young casuist; "a fellow could play to lose money."

"Then a fellow would be an ass," was the prompt reply. "Fancy sitting down to a rotten game to lose! What nonsense you talk, Loder, don't you?"

And Dick had to admit that he did not suppose any man did ever sit down to a card-table with the deliberate object of making some one else a present of his money. But even after he had made this admission, he did not entirely abandon the defence of loo as a pastime.

"I don't suppose one thinks much about it. A fellow sits down to play the game to amuse himself, and if he plays for money, he sometimes loses and sometimes wins. You can't play a game like loo for love, you know—you are bound to have some interest in the game. But I don't believe that a man deliberately calculates beforehand that he is going to win so much or to lose so much. I mean that money is not the sole object of the game."

"Well, I don't profess to know much about it, but I think I can promise you one thing, young man, and that is, that some fellows do calculate beforehand and sit down simply and solely in the hope that they may pick somebody else's pocket. Please don't think for a moment that I say you do, as I don't suppose for a minute that you calculate anything of the sort. But you must either be very lucky or a very fine player if you do not have to calculate sometimes afterwards whether you have won or lost."

"Oh, I do," said Dick quite eagerly—"I always keep a

gambling account;" and then seeing a smile on his host's face, it flashed across his mind that a few minutes ago he had declared that he and his party did not gamble, — "for of course it is gambling of a mild sort, not big gambling, though. I totted it up the other night and I found that I was two or three pounds to the good. I had lost rather over twenty-four and won close on twenty-seven, and that's not a lot after three weeks or more."

"Fifty-one, isn't it, eh? Well, if you play a game at which you can lose over fifty pounds in three weeks, I call it pretty high gambling for a fellow at Oxford. Let's see, fifty call it, and three weeks—that's four hundred a-year anyhow."

"But I have not lost fifty, I've won a bit."

"No, but you might have lost the lot. Fifty pounds has passed through your hands anyhow, and it is only an accident that some of it has stuck there. And if you haven't happened to win or lose a lot yourself, probably some one else has. Where there are pigeons you'll generally find a rook about; and where there are rooks, pigeons come in very handy. And now, for goodness' sake, let us change the subject. I hate cards, and I don't hold with gambling, and that is the long and short of it. Now tell me something more about Chetwynde—Chetwynde and his torpid, not Chetwynde and his loo. You don't row yourself, by the way, do you?—you do the other thing."

"I haven't done anything at all hardly since I came up," said Dick, rather disconsolately. "I broke my arm, and could not play last year."

"Poor beggar! I forgot that. Well, let us hope that you will be able to play this year, and that will keep you out of mischief. That is where my game scores, though I won't say that if I had to start it all again I would not stick to cricket. It comes in handier afterwards. However, I can play after a fashion. I was in the eleven at school, but they turned me on to row and I got to like it. And there is my point: if I broke my arm to-morrow I could coach the 'Varsity all

the same, and it is more amusing, and more exercise too, to coach an eight than to stand shivering behind a net and watch another fellow make bad strokes."

When Dick Loder got back to his room that night, that matter of winning or losing four hundred a-year was rather prominent in his thoughts. "Can't come to as much as that," he said to himself at last; then after a little calculation he decided that Tom M'Gregor's figures were substantially correct. And presently it occurred to him to calculate roughly whether, so far as he could remember, any member of the College loo party had either won or lost as much as M'Gregor had suggested might possibly be the case. And in order to assist his calculations he took a scrap of paper and drew out a list of the probable or at any rate possible gains and losses of each of the five regular players.

"Loder," he muttered; "well, that is simple, plus three we'll call it. Chettie? What did Chettie say the other night? Oh, I know—lost thirty odd," and he wrote on his list, "'Chetwynde, minus thirty,' well, that is some way on to fifty, but it's not fifty anyhow. Wood? Let me think. I know he has had two or three baddish nights, and I don't seem to remember that he has ever had more than one good one; he has won a bit occasionally, of course, but I will bet he has dropped a bit by the end of each week—call it a fiver a-week; no, that's too much, call it ten all told," and down went "Wood, minus ten." "Emden? Same as Wood? Better than Wood? Worse than Wood?" and weighing all the pros and cons in his mind as well as he could remember them, he came to the conclusion that Emden was very much in the same plight as Wood. "Give him the benefit of the doubt," he muttered, and he entered, "Emden, minus eight." "Sadler? Oh, by Jove! He has won, of course, won a lot too; how much? Why, what an ass I am!" and he stared at the list, and the longer he looked at it the less he liked the tale it unfolded, the more he found himself

convinced of the soundness of M'Gregor's argument. There it was in plain black and white—

Loder	+ 3
Chetwynde	− 30
Wood	− 10
Emden	− 8

"Dash it all!" he exclaimed, "the beggar has won forty-five at least, and I believe it's a bit more. And"—for here he remembered the rather unpleasant incident of the previous Saturday night—"all ready too. Why, what a purse the beggar has made out of us! and"—as another little circumstance obtruded itself on his memory—"what the devil does he do with it all?"

And the young philosopher opened his pocket-book and took out of it a little document—

"I O U Ten Pounds; £10.—J. Sadler."

It had happened that quite at the beginning of term Sadler had had a bad night—not quite so bad, Dick had seemed to suspect at the time, as Sadler, who showed some temper on the occasion, had made it out to be. Anyhow, there was no doubt that late in the evening, playing with a hand good enough under ordinary circumstances to secure two tricks, he had been looed ten pounds, and not having, or professing not to have, the money in his pocket, had scribbled off the I O U and thrown it on to the table, where it had eventually been shared between Wood and Dick Loder himself, the former pocketing the paper and handing over to Dick three pounds for the last trick. On the night following, Wood was a rather heavy loser, and Dick himself had won a bit, with the result that Sadler's I O U, being regarded in the light of a marketable commodity, had, probably without Sadler noticing the transaction, been transferred to Dick. So far there had been no attempt to redeem it, Dick never having, in fact, presented it for payment, and Sadler, in the face

of his having pocketed large sums of ready money on more than one subsequent occasion, having made no voluntary proposal to redeem it.

It has been shown that little love—on Dick's side, at all events — was lost between Dick and Sadler; but it was only now, with M'Gregor's downright remarks still ringing in his ears, that Dick, after sorting matters up and down in his own mind, finally pronounced Sadler's entire condemnation.

"He's a regular sweep," he said; "he has taken more than fifty ready. Confound him and his dunning Chettie! Why, I believe old Chettie has paid his battels for him for the last four terms and his tailor's bill into the bargain. And what a stroke of luck my having that money at the bank! Now we can get jolly well shot of old friend Sadler."

And with this comforting reflection Dick took himself off to bed, and slept the sleep of the just and careless.

It had certainly been more by luck than judgment that Dick Loder had had a balance at his banker's—not a very large sum, to be sure, all things considered, but sufficient, at all events, to liquidate Chetwynde's liability to Sadler and leave a few pounds to the good. His yearly income was two hundred and eighty pounds all told—a quarterly allowance, that is, of fifty pounds, which Dick fondly imagined to come out of his father's pocket, but which really did nothing of the sort and eighty pounds paid in two instalments from the College.

"I think the boy ought to have a regular allowance, sir," Graham Loder had said to the Squire, "so I will see that fifty pounds is paid to his credit every quarter. With that and his scholarship he will rub on along all right if he is tolerably careful. I think that perhaps you had better tell him. It is better for him to think that it comes from you."

The Squire had tried to contest the point—he generally did contest points where money was concerned—and now having an idea that an extra hundred a-year could be more profitably employed by himself than by his younger son, he made a

futile attempt to get the amount suggested reduced by a half.

"It's no good," he grumbled, "teaching the young devil extravagant ways. A hundred is plenty for him with what he's got. In fact I thought from the fuss that Leuchars made about his getting that—that—what do you call the d—d thing?—oh, scholarship is it? well, I thought from the fuss Leuchars made that it would keep him altogether. What the devil is the good of a scholarship if it does not keep him altogether, I should like to know?"

"Well, it helps, sir," said Graham quietly, "and so to a certain extent saves"—and here he hesitated between the two pronouns "my" and "your," and finally compromised the matter by admitting joint-ownership—"our pocket. I've had a talk to a few fellows who have been up to Oxford themselves, and they seemed to say about two hundred and fifty to be comfortable and do things, so I thought one ought to leave a small margin."

"Then he will have to pay for his food at home—he eats a lot," said the Squire, making a second rather mean bid for the extra hundred.

It was as much as Graham could do to keep his countenance, but knowing his father's methods, and feeling that to laugh out loud would be fatal, he merely smiled and clinched the matter by bringing forward an entirely new proposition made on the spur of the moment.

"The boy has got a good healthy appetite of his own, I admit, sir; but perhaps he won't trouble you much in the vacation. I have no doubt he could get a tutorship most of the Long at some place where he would get the run of his teeth and something into his pocket into the bargain."

This idea did not commend itself at all to the Squire, who, having a sort of dog-in-the-manger affection for Dick, had been heard to grumble long and loudly when the end of the school holidays robbed him of his younger son's society.

"D—n your tutorship!" he ejaculated with charming in-

consistency. "You don't suppose that I grudge my own son his board and lodging."

On the very next day the Squire, taking full credit to himself for Graham's generosity, informed Dick that henceforth and till further notice he would be allowed two hundred a-year.

"And a very fine allowance I call it for a young fellow of your age. There is no necessity for your spending it all, of course, but I won't have you running into debt, mind."

This warning, which, coming from a man who habitually lived beyond his means, might have sounded to other ears than Dick's almost comical, was in this particular case unnecessary. Some instincts both the brothers had inherited from their mother, and a wholesome horror of running into debt was among them. Nor was there any particular necessity even to stint expenses, and it so happened that Dick's accident, debarring him from ball-games and the incidental expenses attached to them, rendered him unintentionally more economical than he might otherwise have been. However, there was the money, and disregarding that other suggestion made by his father, Dick managed as a rule to spend it very comfortably. But to his credit be it said, having a very justifiable notion that there was a fairly heavy doctor's bill accumulating at Oxford, he had wisely allowed a certain fund to accumulate at the same time in order to meet the bill when it was sent in. The home doctor's fees were—such was the young man's argument—a part of his home expenses, and therefore to be defrayed by his father, but the Oxford doctor was a College expense to be debited to himself.

It had come, therefore, in the light of a pleasant surprise when the Oxford doctor on being invited, as he at last gave Mr Loder his *congé*, to send in his account, flatly refused to do anything of the sort.

"If you get measles or smallpox, my dear fellow," he said, growing rather red in the face as he spoke, "come to me to be tinkered up and I will send you in a whacking big bill, but I

really can't make any charge for accidents;" and having told this astonishing lie with the very best grace at his command, medico dismissed his grateful patient, shut the door carefully after him, and then throwing himself into an armchair, indulged in a hearty fit of laughter.

"I hope the young beggar—nice boy too—won't go off and send me half-a-dozen other fellows with broken limbs, by way of showing his gratitude. What a humbug I am when all is said and done, but I really could not go and give Mr Ferrier away after that," and he slapped his pocket by way of assuring himself that "that" was still there. "That" had arrived about two hours previously, and took the form of a very graceful letter of thanks to Mr Roden for his care and attention, and a cheque for twenty-five guineas in payment of somewhere about a year's term-time doctoring of Mr Richard Loder, and both these documents were signed by Laurence Ferrier. And there had been a word of warning conveyed in a postscript: "You will, I am sure, say nothing about this to your patient."

Ferrier had his own way of doing things—ways which, lawyer though he was, were commonly short, straight, and to the point. He had in this instance employed the very simple process of running down to Oxford in January, and after making inquiries of one or two reputable tradesmen as to who was the best young surgeon in Oxford, he had called upon Mr Roden, explained the object of his mission, and even offered a very handsome cheque in advance for services to be rendered. There, and there only, the surgeon drew the line, basing his objection on grounds which made Lawrence say to himself, fortunately on this occasion not out loud—

"What unfeeling beasts these doctors can be!"

"Oh no, my dear sir," Roden had said, "that is quite unnecessary, I assure you. Why, it wants a whole fortnight to the beginning of term, and the lad might break his neck or have his arm taken off in the mean time. A fracture in itself may be a very simple thing, but is very often followed or accompanied by complications. Why, my dear sir, I have known

cases of men who have had a fracture of this kind, and it has gone on perfectly well to all appearances for a week or a fortnight or more, and then something has gone wrong and there has had to be a resort to amputation. Indeed I won't say that under certain surroundings mortification might not set in. However, you say that your young friend is a healthy subject, so we will hope that all will go on well. But I can't really hear of receiving a fee beforehand. So good morning, Mr Ferrier: if Mr Loder comes up at the beginning of term, send him to me and I will look after him."

And as there were no very untoward results in the outset from the broken arm, Dick Loder came up to Oxford towards the end of January, and having received a friendly note from Laurence Ferrier to the effect that it would be very kind of him, in case the arm gave any trouble, to call in a clever young surgeon, who, as the writer happened to know, was anxious to get on in his profession, he acted on the suggestion, and calling in Mr Roden, eventually had very good cause to be grateful that he had done so.

For a man who has to re-break and re-set a badly united fracture, and then ostensibly charges nothing for his trouble, is a veritable godsend, were he the most confirmed croaker in creation.

CHAPTER XI.

STILL OXFORD.

A DILEMMA is, as M'Gregor had described it, a queer sort of beast: if good, undeniably good; if faulty, then the sort of animal that might pass muster with a careless or indifferent judge, but liable to be returned on hand as unsound where a lengthy trial is allowed.

Breakfasting with Chetwynde, as was his custom, on the morning after his dinner with Tom M'Gregor, Dick Loder, having certain weighty matters in his mind, anxious to take Chetwynde into his confidence, yet not having evolved on his own account a satisfactory opening for a conversation on a rather ticklish subject, swallowed his food in silence for a considerable time, and then rather basely attempted to pass off on his companion the dilemma which he had himself rejected.

"I say, Chettie," he remarked quite suddenly, "I am going to give you a dilemma."

"Well, give me another sausage first, old chap. I'm parlous hungry. Thanky," as Dick complied with the request. "Now, what's the other thing I was going to have—a dilemma, wasn't it? Fire away, only I say, bar sells, old Dick."

"Oh, there's no catch about it. It was only why one played loo."

"Because one is an ass, I suppose," exclaimed Chetwynde, converting the beast into a trilemma at once, even before it had

been brought up to the starting-post. For a moment the answer rather disconcerted Dick, because he could not help remembering that M'Gregor had said something very like it, *apropos* of those imaginary jackasses of Dick's creation who were supposed to play loo for the pleasure of losing money.

"What a deuce of a hurry you're in, Chettie! What I was going to say when you interrupted me was, Do you play loo to amuse yourself, or do you play loo to win money?"

"I say, old chap, we said bar sells, didn't we?" said Chetwynde, still a little nervous as to Dick's intentions. "I mean it's not one of those silly conundrums they used to ask at school about shepherds and parsons and so forth?"

And Dick having denied that there was any connection between his dilemma and the old schoolboy catches, Chetwynde for a moment gave the question more serious consideration.

"Do I play loo to win money or to pass the time?" he said, repeating the original question, but transposing the alternatives. "Well, I certainly don't win money, because I nearly always manage to lose: not that I should not like to win occasionally, as losing every night is apt to get monotonous as well as expensive. But hang me if I would like to win every night, all the same. It would be no fun always to win, would it? and a bit rough on you fellows too. Well, I don't know why I do play quite except *pour passer le temps;* and I suppose that is to amuse myself, though it palls a bit sometimes to go on planking down your money just to see that Sadler rake it in, doesn't it?"

"There you are, then," exclaimed Dick triumphantly, quite as pleased for the moment that Dilemma had come home a winner as if it had really been his own horse. "You and I play to pass the time, Chettie, and that sweep Sadler plays to win money, and—and to pay his beastly battels."

"Well," said Chetwynde rather doubtfully, "the beastly battels have to be paid somehow, and I suppose that if he does win a lot, some of it may as well go that way as any other. But I think I see what you are driving at, Dick; you

and I and the other men are amateur card-players, and Sadler, bother him, why, he is a downright professional."

"Right you are," pronounced Dick. "Odd thing too, till you mentioned the words I never thought of amateur and professional. It hits it straight: the fellow who plays to amuse himself is an amateur right enough, and the money-grubbing beast is a professional. Sadler is a money-grubbing beast; ergo Sadler is a professional. Look here, Chettie," and he passed him the slip of paper on which he had figured out the hypothetical results of the term's play, "I don't know what you think about it, but I am through with loo. It's a rotten game in itself to start with; it is ten times more rotten when one professional plays with four amateurs."

Chetwynde put the paper by his plate and studied it with some attention, eating his breakfast at the same time. Then he took a pencil out of his pocket, and after altering a figure or two, handed it back to Dick.

"I know that is right," he remarked, "because I do keep accounts of a sort, and I have lost quite thirty-five, and we did not have a loo last night, so I played a game of piquet with Wood, and he happened to say what he had lost. Emden I have left alone, but it tots up that the pro. has won eight pounds more than you gave him credit for. You are quite in your rights, Dick, my boy—I am off the game too. But now, tell me something. Who set you to work thinking of all this? You are a precious clever fellow and all that, I know, Dick, but I am not going to believe that you ever sat down and figured this all out by yourself without somebody having put you up to it."

"Well, I was dining with M'Gregor last night, and he was rather down upon loo," admitted Dick.

"Wheugh!" Chetwynde gave vent to a protracted whistle. "I guessed as much. Old Monty told me once that M'Gregor hated cards like poison. Don't you remember when we first started our loo Monty came into the room, and saying that it was lucky for us youngsters that Tom M'Gregor wasn't in the

land of the living?—at least he didn't say lucky, he said it was a pity, and I'm not sure he wasn't about right. Monty always swore by M'Gregor, and so do a lot of people—your friend the Bursar even. Well, I am with you then, Dick, no more loo for Chettie. But I say, old man, how shall we do it? We must work out a plan of campaign."

"How shall we do it?" exclaimed Dick, rather contemptuously, tearing the incriminating document into small pieces as he spoke, throwing them into the fire, and then filling a pipe. "Do what? Stop playing loo? Who the dickens is going to make us play loo if we don't want? We are not exactly babies, are we?"

"Perhaps not," said Chetwynde, rather with the air of a man who only concedes a point because it is not worth arguing out. "But you see, Dick, it is more or less plain sailing with me. I have dropped a fairish lot, and I really don't know that I could afford to go on much longer at the same rate. But you've won a bit, and——"

"Stop," interrupted Dick; "that is where you are wrong, my man. I have not won, as a matter of fact. Oh, I know," hurriedly forestalling the coming objection; "on that paper I have won two or three pounds, but it is only on paper; in ready I'm a lot out of pocket—No," again stopping Chetwynde, "not what you owe me—that is all right, and I shouldn't care if it wasn't, old chap—but I have got this," and he produced Sadler's I O U, "and this is a precious sight more to the purpose."

"Why, what are you going to do with it? and oh, by George! Dick, do you mean to say you had this in your pocket on Saturday night when you shelled out that fifteen quid for me to Sadler? I say, Dick," for Dick had nodded assent to the last question, "what on earth did you want to do that for? and what, in the name of all that's good or bad, did the fellow mean by taking the money?"

"I never heard a man ask so many questions as you do, Chettie; they come in a perfect avalanche. I haven't made

up my mind what I shall do with the thing yet—very likely I may burn it; anyhow I shall never ask him for the money. He can keep it as a sort of month's wages instead of warning, for all I care. I did have it in my pocket on Saturday night, but I will do the fellow the justice to say that I doubt if it ever entered into his head that I had got it. As for my taking it off what I paid him, I could not very well do that, you know. I was not going to put myself on the same level as a fellow like Sadler, and dun him as I considered he tried to dun you. There is no reason why one fellow should be nasty if another is, and besides, it is always as well to have a bit up your sleeve."

Chetwynde, having just been accused of asking too many questions, now said nothing at all for some minutes, but sat still, smoking his pipe, and arguing the matter backwards and forwards in his own mind. He failed somehow or other to work things out to his satisfaction. On the one hand, it seemed all wrong that his friend Dick should come off a loser, and that very inferior person Sadler a winner, on both counts. Then it occurred to him that, after all, Dick would in the long-run be a loser on one count only, and so far that was more satisfactory. But again Dick's manner even more than Dick's words seemed to tell him that Sadler would be left an all-round winner, and that came under the heading of most unsatisfactory. Finally he tried to put himself in Dick's position under the circumstances, and that seemed to resolve a rather complex matter into two comparatively simple questions: 1. If Sadler had spoken to Dick in the nasty sort of way in which he had spoken to Chetwynde, would Chetwynde have produced his cheque-book and then and there stopped Sadler's tongue? Of course he would—that is, if he had had the money at the bank, and even Dick himself could not have acted as he had done if the money had been there. 2. If Chetwynde had been holding Sadler's I O U at the time that he was preparing to discharge Dick's liabilities, would he have produced the I O U and simply paid the difference, or would he have paid the whole amount and ignored the matter of the I O U? There

he could not be quite sure, but on the whole he seemed to favour Dick's proceeding; anyhow, he felt quite certain that he liked Dick all the better for it, and he positively hated Sadler.

"I'll tell you what it is, old Dick," he said at last. "You and I have been putting ourselves on Sadler's level long enough already. It's time we draw the line anyhow between amateurs and professionals, and as I don't care one hang about loo in itself, and loo seems to mean Sadler's company, I am through with loo, thanks to you, and perhaps, as you will say, thanks to M'Gregor. Now tell me one more thing before we get rid of this beastly subject, what are you going to do with that I O U? I wouldn't burn it yet awhile."

"I don't think I will, not yet awhile anyhow," and Dick carefully replaced the I O U in his pocket-book. "Now if Mr Sadler does not choose to say anything, I shall not choose to say anything, and he can keep his ten pounds; but if he makes any nasty remarks, he will find that other people can be nasty too."

The subject was then finally dismissed, and they went on talking about M'Gregor, Chetwynde wondering how soon he should make that illustrious authority's acquaintance, until ten o'clock struck, when Chetwynde rushed off to a lecture.

Had the man Sadler been gifted to know, as the saying goes, he would have held his tongue and allowed the two defaulters from the loo-table to go their way in peace. Unfortunately for him, in his anxiety to bring the two offenders to book for having broken up what had been to him a very profitable party, he turned up to lunch in Chetwynde's rooms a few days later. It was the custom in St Hilary's for men to congregate in each other's rooms rather promiscuously at luncheon without any special invitation, so that there was nothing unusual in his thus appearing. As it happened, there was only a limited attendance—Chetwynde, Dick Loder, a fourth-year man who had lodgings in the High, and Sadler himself.

Presently Sadler began to air his latest grievance—not too

wise a proceeding under any circumstances—in a not too friendly circle, a distinctly hazardous experiment.

"What's all this nonsense about you two fellows not turning up to loo any longer, Chettie? You've spoilt our party. What on earth have you turned crusty about?"

"Who said I had turned crusty?" was the rather diplomatic reply. "But if you want to have a reason, I think I have lost quite enough already."

"Oh! and I suppose Loder is the other way up. He has won enough already, and thinks he had better sit tight on his winnings!"

Sadler's tone and manner were alike disagreeable, and a slight tinge of colour that for a moment appeared on Dick Loder's commonly rather pale face convinced two men in the room, at all events, of the truth of the proverb that warns us to let sleeping dogs lie. But for the minute he kept his temper under admirable control.

"I don't think it is that quite. But I seem to have had about enough of it, thank you."

"And enough of our money too, I suppose," sneered Sadler.

"I am not a big winner," replied Dick with studied calmness. "In fact I never have been a big winner at any time, and now," producing the I O U and holding it so that Sadler might be able to read it, "I am not a winner at all," and with that he carelessly crumpled the paper up and threw it into the fire.

"Bravo, Dick!" muttered Chetwynde under his breath, while the fourth member of the party, having a suspicion rather than a certain knowledge of the contents of the paper, smiled approvingly under cover of helping himself to a glass of sherry.

"How the devil am I to take that, Loder?" exclaimed Sadler, springing from his chair in a perfect paroxysm of rage.

"Just as you like, sitting or standing, for all I care," and Dick shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and in his turn helped himself to sherry.

For a moment Sadler stood irresolute, half inclined to throw

himself then and there upon Dick; and then falling back on that better part of valour, he appealed to his host—

"I don't know whether you ask a fellow to your rooms to be insulted, Chetwynde, but——"

The speaker stopped rather abruptly, not having sufficiently made up his mind beforehand how to finish his sentence, and being well beyond the thinking stage of indignation.

"I didn't ask you at all, if it comes to that. I did ask Loder, and I certainly did not ask him here to be insulted. If you had left Loder alone, he would have left you alone; but you chose to make very nasty insinuations, and now you have got your answer. If I had been in Dick's place, I should have done the same. And now as you seem to have finished your lunch, and I am not going to have a row in my rooms, though I didn't ask you to come, I will ask you to go."

"Hear, hear," said the fourth man, who had never made the slightest pretension of concealing his dislike for Sadler.

"I'm glad you two fellows are through with that fellow at last," he remarked as Sadler, making the best of a thoroughly bad position, stalked out of the room and slammed the door behind him. "It has always passed my comprehension how two men like you, for I believe you have both got your merits, could sit down in the same room with that—that specimen—for ten minutes without having a row with him. Well now, you've had it, and I'm very glad you have had it, and here," draining off his sherry, "is my blessing to you both, and many more of them. Sadler is, and always has been, a thoroughly bad lot, and you are devilish lucky to be quit of him."

Two days later Sadler sent Dick a cheque for ten pounds, and as that also went straight from Dick's hand into the fire-place, there was a final end of the episode as well as of the St Hilary's loo-parties.

CHAPTER XII.

A FORTUNATE ACCIDENT.

It has been said that the stars in their courses had been fighting against Dick Loder for more than a year at Oxford; that matters, in themselves inconsiderable, had so combined as to supply the framework of a considerable indictment; that in fact, if any person at all behind the scenes had been called upon to pronounce an opinion upon Mr Loder's career so far as it had gone, he must have pronounced it to be distinctly unsatisfactory.

But now after months of weary waiting a benignant star had appeared on the horizon, Mr Loder's luck had changed, and Fortune, sullen no longer, was wreathing her face with smiles.

It was impossible for the young man himself to be unconscious of the change: he could not help feeling that things which he had spoken of as "going criss-cross" were under some kindly influence beginning to straighten themselves out, and he not improperly regarded his budding acquaintanceship with Tom M'Gregor as materially connected with this new aspect of affairs. That he had ever been especially recommended to M'Gregor's care by the collective forethought of the Bursar, whom he did to some extent know and like, and of Ingram, whom he had never seen but was quite prepared to like, had naturally never crossed his imagination.

The threads of destiny were in this case, as in many others, being waxed by invisible hands. He not only felt duly grateful to M'Gregor, but early in their acquaintanceship discovering that the more he saw of that gentleman the more thorough and sound he found him to be, by the end of a fortnight he, being at once impulsive and impressionable, was prepared to swear that, next to his own brother Graham, Tom M'Gregor was the very best fellow who ever stepped. Chetwynde was a very good fellow in his way, a thorough gentleman, a warm-hearted and staunch friend, and a very lively and cheery companion; but, after all, Chetwynde was a bit of a butterfly like himself, and where common-sense and downright speaking were concerned, Dick felt that a wide gulf lay between Tom M'Gregor and Alan Chetwynde.

Love, they tell us, will in time breed love, and so it fell about that Tom having in the initiatory stage of acquaintanceship regarded the younger man with a kindly curiosity, looking upon him in the light, as he confessed himself, of a healthy subject for experiment, amused by his semi-shy gratitude but wholly pleasing manner of expressing it, shortly began to entertain a very warm affection for his adopted pupil, whose sunny disposition and cheery manners carried Mentor's thoughts back to his own undergraduate days.

"You and your experiment seem to hit it off rarely well together, Tom," remarked the Bursar, who had watched the growing intimacy between the M.A. and the scholar with much interest and some amusement.

"There is something very attractive about the boy," replied Tom, laughing, "he is so very young in some ways and so very sensible in others. I think I shall have to get you to come and meet him at dinner in my rooms some night, so that you may really and properly make his acquaintance. It is an odd thing, is it not, how a sense of responsibility seems to go on growing, if it once settles down fairly on one's shoulders? You know I only took up this sort of line to satisfy Ingram and yourself, and now I enjoy it vastly, and yet I cannot help

having the sort of feeling that I am like Sinbad and have got the Old Man of the Sea on my back, and shall have to shake him off some day."

"Don't follow you," growled the Bursar; "who's your Old Man of the Sea?"

"Why, young Loder in a way: he doesn't squeeze exactly like Sinbad's friend, but he seems to cling tight in a way, and yet he will have to go some day. I can't stay up here for ever."

"Ah, and you think he will drift back again, and that is why you want me to know the lad, so that he will have a friend in court always. Look you here, you young M'Gregor, I am not going to be drawn at my time of life into mixing myself up with these boys' moral training. *Nolo episcopari*, or better still, *non possum*. It wants a lighter hand and a readier wit than I have, and a good deal more than that too. But I'll come and dine with you for all that, and will try to make an especial exception in favour of your infant."

The term passed on, the 'Varsity Eight went off to the London waters. The Torpids were over, and yet, much to a good many men's surprise, Tom M'Gregor lingered on at Oxford, and even announced his intention of coming up again in May and taking the St Hilary's boat in hand. From a small place that he had for two years rented on the Thames near Pangbourne he had sent for a dogcart and a couple of useful horses, which he established under charge of his groom in the stables of the Mitre. It was only in the last two or three weeks of term that he took to driving much about the country, having at first found plenty of occupation for himself and his animals on the towing-path between Iffley and Oxford, with an occasional variation in the way of accompanying the boat on the long course between Abingdon and Nuneham.

Much to Chetwynde's satisfaction, one of the offending heavy-weights had been promptly sent to the right-about by the new coach within a week of his arrival.

"Well, I thought him rather a pretty oar myself," objected

a man who had coached the Eight for a few days before M'Gregor came up.

"It isn't a beauty show," said the new critic, "and he don't pull his boots."

Now it has been shown how Dick Loder had by an unfortunate accident fallen out of favour with Lewis, the mathematical lecturer. To be sure, as Tom M'Gregor remarked, it was not a matter of vital importance whether Lewis chose to like or dislike an undergraduate. For he was not likely under any circumstances to be either actively aggressive or the reverse, nor was there the slightest reason why a classical scholar should in any way whatever come into contact with a man who only lectured in mathematics to a very limited circle. And then, again, the unfriendliness, real or imaginary —all that there was of it, in fact—was absolutely one-sided. For though Lewis had some grounds for thinking that the world might have gone on quite as well, and in certain respects even more comfortably, if one Richard Loder had never been born, or had never come to Oxford, or at any rate had never thought fit to amuse himself by snowballing in the quadrangle, Mr Loder himself, taking all things into consideration, would almost have preferred that his snowball should have hit Chetwynde on the head, as it was intended to do, than waste its sweetness on the Common-room window, the Common-room inkstand, and indirectly Lewis's stomach. However, it was well that the idea of any cause of offence should be buried in oblivion, and that Dick Loder, by availing himself of an accidental opportunity of proffering kindly service, should eliminate from the mathematician's mind all traces of resentment for the past misdemeanour. And in this, as in many other similar matters, he owed the presentment of the opportunity for creating a favourable impression to his friendship with Tom M'Gregor.

It happened that on one of the last days of term M'Gregor had engaged himself to dine and sleep at a house some three or four miles on the other side of Abingdon, and Dick Loder

readily agreed to drive to his destination with him and bring back the dogcart.

"We'll take the groom, I think, Dick," said M'Gregor, as they prepared to start. "It's a long dull drive for you back alone, and besides, you won't care to come up to the house. They will make you drink tea and all that sort of thing, and keep the old mare standing."

So at five or thereabouts on a March afternoon Dick found himself driving on his return journey through the streets of Abingdon, and having got so far, made up his mind to take what is called the upper road to Oxford.

"I hate all these plaguy little hills between Radley and Kennington," he remarked; "I'd rather have one or two pulls up and then good easy runs down—wouldn't you, John?" and he let the mare go easily up the long hill which skirts the upper end of Radley, handing the reins to the groom as he spoke and preparing to light a pipe.

"There's one there as don't seem to reckon much on a long pull up nor a short one neither. Looks almost as if he'd gotten a stone in his foot, don't he?" observed the groom, pointing with his whip to the figure of a man limping painfully along the road, a hundred yards ahead of them.

"By Jove, he is a dot-and-go-one party, isn't he?" said Dick. "I wonder where the poor beggar is going to. We might give him a lift, John, mightn't we?"

"I don't know as Mister M'Gregor would quite like it," muttered John, conscious that he was not telling the truth, but by no means relishing the idea of having to get out and alter the seat of the cart for the convenience of a stray foot-passenger. "He'll get home some time if he keeps hisself agoing, and he ain't nobbut but a tramp;" and with this charitable suggestion he gave the mare a flick with the whip, in the hope that passing the wayfarer was the most certain method of disposing of any idea of giving him a lift.

"Tramp be blowed," suddenly exclaimed Dick with un-

expected animation; "why, it is one of our dons, I tell you. Pull up at once, John. It is Mr Lewis." And in an instant he had jumped to the ground and immediately accosted Lewis. It was the latter's custom to take his daily exercise in the form of a long and solitary constitutional, and as he generally had his mind occupied either by the composition or the solution of some abstruse problem, it is hardly to be wondered that misfortune occasionally overtook him by the way. That he had walked into two or three open ditches, had been run down on one occasion by an old woman in a donkey-cart, on another by a small boy on a bicycle, had had sundry tall hats—he always affected that form of head-dress — damaged by overhanging boughs of trees, and had even—so at least the Bursar avowed—been known to walk into the back of a stationary traction-engine, were only so many incidents in a long and checkered career. But when a short-sighted man habitually walks very fast with his eyes on the ground, and his thoughts preoccupied, he may really be said to be courting disaster, and to be congratulated if he escapes without an occasional broken bone. So far in Lewis's case no bones had been broken, but on this particular day he happened to have trodden on a loose stone, and to have twisted his ankle so badly that walking was pain and grief to him. The accident had only occurred a quarter of an hour before the dog-cart overtook him, and part of that time had been spent in leaning against a stile and calculating whether it would be the wiser course to walk back to Abingdon and wait for a train or to make the effort to cover the four miles which still separated him from Oxford. Uncertainty about the running of the trains and a vague hope that, as he neared Oxford, there might be a chance of hailing a passing cab, finally decided him in favour of the latter alternative; but he had not gone on his way a hundred yards before he almost repented of his choice, and stopped again to wonder whether it would not be wiser after all to retrace his footsteps.

"Perhaps I shall walk it off," he muttered, and again he started on his painful and toilsome journey, only to be in a few minutes sorrowfully conscious that instead of "walking it off," he was going through exactly the opposite process. However, there was nothing for it but to go on and trust that he might get to his journey's end some time. For far in the distance there was looming a glimpse of consolation. Morris, the great mathematical light of the day, had promised to look in on him at nine o'clock that night, and Morris, who had dabbled in strange sciences, was just the sort of man who would know the proper treatment for a twisted ankle. The wheels of M'Gregor's dogcart were, as it so happened, fitted with india-rubber tyres, so that Lewis, eyes on the ground as usual, was quite unconscious that any one was near him until he suddenly heard himself addressed by name.

"Eh! what?" he exclaimed, starting and looking up.

"I thought it was you, Mr Lewis; I am afraid you have hurt yourself. I have got M'Gregor's dogcart here. May I give you a lift back to Oxford?"

A lift back to Oxford was just the one thing that Lewis had been praying for in his heart; but who was this very urbane and very friendly young gentleman who was standing there smiling, with hat in hand, and claiming his acquaintance?

"What? Who? I seem to know your face somehow. Lecture-room? Jones of Jesus? No, bless my soul! who is it? It's—it's—Mr—Mr——"

"Loder, sir."

Mr Loder! to be sure it was Mr Loder, that very pernicious young man, as Lewis had not long ago called him. But now Mr Loder's intentions were distinctly benevolent.

"If you don't mind waiting a moment, sir, I'll just get the back seat right, and then I'll give you a hoist up in front;" and almost before Lewis could take in the situation, he found himself almost lifted into the cart, a rug carefully wrapped round his shoulders, and the mare trotting on merrily towards

Oxford. There had been a few grunts, a few murmured objections, but there he was sitting, almost for the first time in his life, in a rather high dogcart, and sitting for quite the first time in his life cheek by jowl with that very dangerous, and yet very charming-mannered, young man Mr Loder.

"Doesn't this cart of M'Gregor's run easily?" remarked Dick, when they had gone for a full mile in absolute silence. "I hope it does not shake your leg at all. May I ask how you have hurt it?"

"Ankle twisted—didn't look where I was going, I suppose; trod on a stone—the trap is quite easy, thank you," and after jerking out those words, two or three at a time, Lewis again relapsed into silence. Just before they reached Folly Bridge, however, he suddenly reopened the conversation.

"Cricketer, aren't you?"

"Yes, I used to play till I broke my arm," answered Dick, who, busy with his own thoughts, was rather startled by the abruptness of the question. "And I hope I shall be able to play again all right this year."

"Learnt to throw there, I suppose? cricket is better than rowing. Morris used to play cricket once. But you don't know Morris?"

Dick frankly confessed that he did not enjoy the honour of the gentleman's acquaintance, wondering in his own mind as he spoke who the devil Morris might be, and whether the inference that cricket was better than rowing had been drawn from the mere circumstance that Morris had once been a cricketer.

"I suppose," he suggested, "some men like one, and some the other. Was Mr Morris a bowler or a bat?"

If he intended his rather vapid remark, and equally vapid question, to form the groundwork of a more interesting conversation, Mr Loder must have been disappointed, as his companion paid no attention to either the one or the other. But it was wholly characteristic of this young man thus to lend himself even to the paltry devices in conversation by way of

keeping up a good understanding with the man he was talking to.

Not another word was spoken till they reached the College gates, where Dick not only assisted his companion to descend from his high perch, but carried his politeness so far as to offer him an arm across the quadrangle—an attention which the other would have gladly dispensed with had he not discovered that his ankle had grown so abominably stiff that walking alone was a practical impossibility. And in the course of this progress they might have run full tilt against the Bursar on his way to the hall, if that gentleman, after convincing himself by the aid of his spectacles that the unexpected vision which seemed to greet his eyes was really and truly no optical delusion, had not decided that one good Samaritan at a time was quite sufficient, and so wisely elected to pass by on the other side.

"Bursar, wasn't it?" inquired Lewis suspiciously, as Dick assisted him into his room; and receiving an answer in the affirmative, he simply ejaculated, "Odd man, very—blind too, that's a comfort."

"Shall I call your scout for you, sir?" inquired Dick, having helped the crippled man into an arm-chair.

"No,—yes, I mean. Thank you. Good night."

"Well, you are a rum old beggar," thought Dick, as he made his way to his own rooms; "I don't believe you are the least bit grateful." And he continued to entertain this opinion until such a time when, on the last Wednesday of the term, he met the Bursar at dinner in King Edward Street. The Bursar himself had in the interim applied to M'Gregor for an explanation of the strange incident he had witnessed, and had been rather astonished to discover that Tom was even more in the dark than himself, having never heard one single word from Dick Loder on the matter.

"But why didn't you ask Lewis?" inquired Tom.

"You don't know him quite so well as I do, young man, or you wouldn't ask that question. But Lewis is all right,"

and he winked mysteriously; "he does not say much, but he thinks, and when he does speak he sometimes speaks to some purpose. You weren't in Common-room last night?"

"No, I was dining in Corpus."

"Well, I am going to dine with you to-night to meet that boy."

"Yes; we'll have it all out of him, too."

"We will do nothing of the kind. You leave him to me this once, Master Tom. Shy pair of fellows in their different ways both of them."

The dinner in King Edward Street went off with great *éclat*, but no allusion of any kind was made to Dick's late adventures. But that young gentleman, though at first rather awed into silence by the Bursar's presence, presently awaking to the fact that the latter was doing his very best to show that he took a friendly interest in him and to entice him to join in the conversation, gradually thawed and enjoyed his evening vastly.

"They tell me that you are a great cricketer, Loder. I hope we are to see you playing in the University team," the Bursar presently observed.

"I doubt if I am quite good enough for that, sir," said Dick, blushing, "but I hope they will give me a try in the Parks. Do you often go to watch the matches?"

"Not once in a blue moon," confessed the Bursar; "but if you do get your colours, I will undertake to go to Lord's and see you play there. It will be quite a new departure for St Hilary's to have a man in the eleven again."

And when the party broke up the Bursar walked back to College with the young undergraduate, and, rather to the latter's surprise, asked for an arm upstairs.

"Not the first time you have helped a lame duck upstairs, eh, Mr Loder?"

The question came so suddenly just as they reached the Bursar's room that Dick positively started.

"No, not quite," he stammered.

"Come inside for a moment," said the Bursar, as he opened the door of his room; "even here walls may have ears. And now, Mr Loder," he went on very gravely, "please imagine yourself for a minute in the palace of truth, and tell me why you never mentioned what happened between yourself and Mr Lewis the other day to M'Gregor."

"Well, sir," confesssd Dick, looking rather confused, "there wasn't much to tell, after all; and besides, I didn't think that Mr Lewis seemed very—very——"

"'Gracious' or 'grateful,' which, or both?" and the Bursar felt distinctly well pleased as he supplied the missing words—pleased that he had correctly divined the reason of Dick's silence. And then he went on to deliver a short lecture.

"Don't think, then, it is a bad habit. Quite right not to tell Tom M'Gregor, as you did think that. But you were wrong in your judgments, young man. Mr Lewis is rather like another person I know, who does not say quite everything straight out. But now as you have told me one thing, I will tell you another, which is not to go any further, mind; Mr Lewis has got a tongue in his head after all, and he did speak up for you very strongly a day or two ago—so now, good night."

Nothwithstanding that he had enjoined silence on Dick Loder himself, the Bursar gave himself the pleasure of recounting to Tom M'Gregor a few hours later the manner in which Lewis, having hobbled to the Common-room after dinner, and being appealed to by Carr to indorse the latter's statement that "young Loder was an insolent young ruffian," had then and there in the Bursar's presence, metaphorically speaking, fallen upon Carr tooth and nail and rent him asunder. The Bursar even quoted with much gusto Lewis's peroration.

"Get a first-class in manners, sir, without your assistance. Formed his idea of your classics, sir, from your manners, sir, I fancy; left your lectures, and quite right too. Look at home, sir, look at home when you talk of manners."

"I won't deny," said the Bursar in conclusion, "that our

worthy Lewis is a bit of a Goth himself; but his heart is in the right place, if his manners are not. And it is because his manners are Gothic, my good Tom, that our young friend chose to hold his tongue. Nice lad that, Tom, and sensible for all he is young. I like him, and so does Lewis."

Thus it came to pass that at the end of that term the young scholar of St Hilary's, as he shook the dust of Oxford from his feet, left behind him in more quarters than one a distinctly favourable impression.

CHAPTER XIII.

MAY TERM.

The first Wednesday of the May term was a typical May day —typical, that is, of what a May day generally is at Oxford, as well as elsewhere, — bright sun, cutting wind, clouds of dust, and generally uncomfortable. In the afternoon Dick Loder, in preparation for the Seniors' match, had been dutifully practising at a net, and, rather to his amusement, M'Gregor had accompanied him, and had not only engaged a professional on his own account, but, equally to the surprise of Dick Loder and the professional himself, had after the first few minutes hit nearly every ball sent down to him with a fairly straight bat and unmistakable vigour.

"Why, I had no idea you could bat like that," exclaimed Dick, who, having taken off his own pads, was standing behind M'Gregor's net, and had just seen the professional throw himself flat on his face as the simplest way of escaping destruction from a terribly hot return.

"Because you were an unbelieving young Jew," retorted Tom. "There, that's enough, thank you," to the professional, who had picked himself up and was wiping his knees. "Why didn't you catch it?"

"Only too glad as she didn't catch me, sir," answered the man, grinning. "You do hit 'em hard and no mistake. My! how she 'ummed!"

"Now are you ready, young man?" inquired Tom, when, a few minutes later, he had finished changing. "I want to go back through the Corn, if you don't mind. I've got some things to buy, and I am not due at the river till five-thirty."

Approaching the Corn from St Giles's, the pair were suddenly aware of a surging and rapidly increasing crowd in front of a butcher's shop a hundred yards or so ahead of them.

"Hullo! what's up, I wonder," exclaimed Tom. "Oh!" as an unmistakable sound of snarling and worrying reached his ears, "a dog-fight as usual. What beasts men are!" and he frowned angrily as he watched the eagerness with which those in the outer ring of the circle were craning their necks to look over the shoulders of their more fortunate companions of the inner circle.

"They are much more beasts than the animals themselves," he went on. "Come along, Dick—what do you want to stop for?"

"One second," exclaimed Dick, whose roving eye had just lighted upon the figure of a girl who was standing on the pavement in the outskirts of the crowd. That she was young, pretty, and at once tastefully and quietly dressed, did not for the moment appeal to the young Oxonian half so forcibly as the fact that quivering lips, frightened and tearful eyes, showed that she was in deep distress. She was talking passionately to a mild-looking old lady in spectacles, who, palpably upset herself, was trying to restrain her young companion from some desperate course of action.

"What is the good of talking of police, Miss Firchild? I tell you there never are any police, and oh—my poor Tory! I will, I tell you," and disregarding the old lady's efforts to restrain her, the girl made as though she was going to attempt to force a passage through the brutal crowd.

In a moment Dick had flown to the assistance of beauty in distress.

"Is there anything I can do for you? Is it your dog fighting?"

"That horrid beast flew at him. Oh, if you could, sir, if you would——"

Before the sentence was completed the evidence of the power and the will was forthcoming. Ably seconded by Tom M'Gregor, whose powerful shoulders and formidable elbows cleared a way for the pair in no time, Dick forced his way into the inner ring and at once grasped the situation. An ugly long-jawed bull-terrier had pinned, by the collar as it turned out most fortunately, a plucky little Skye terrier, which, borne to the ground by superior weight and the suddenness of the attack, was battling as best it might for dear life under most hopeless conditions. A brawny butcher with blue apron and sleeves rolled up to his elbows, evidently the owner of the attacking dog, was at once acting as ringmaster and urging on his favourite, keeping the ring and ensuring what he was pleased to call fair play by the simple process of hitting out violently on both sides of him when the crowd encroached too much. Red in the face with excitement, he alternately swore at some over-inquisitive spectator and shouted information as to the progress of the fight for the benefit of those who might be enjoying an imperfect view of the proceedings.

"Stand back there, d—n you! Give old Tip a chance. I know by his eye as he'll let go and take a fresh holt in 'arf a second. And then he'll finish him. Ah, didn't I tell you?"

For at that moment the bull-terrier, a born fighter by instinct, did relax its hold on the collar, preparing to take a new and more fatal grip of its far weaker and now breathless adversary.

"Take that dog off at once, man," exclaimed Dick, having elbowed his way into the ring, which by a sort of automatic process at once expanded. When two dogs are at work a narrow ring is big enough for practical purposes, but when two men come to high words, and blows seem imminent, it is safer policy to allow them a wider berth.

"Thank'ee, young man," he remarked, not without a touch of irony in his voice; "my dug can take care of hisself, and I reckon as I can take care of myself."

"Bravo, Billy the Butcher!" the hoarse cry issued as if by common consent from the throats of a good dozen of the redoubtable butcher's admirers, only to be immediately succeeded by a guttural exclamation of wonder, surprise, and perhaps here and there of admiration.

For Dick Loder, taking no notice of the butcher's remark, had at once disproved the accuracy of the former part of his statement by taking vigorous action. The bull-terrier had not had time to pick a convenient spot on the other dog's throat for a "fresh holt," when Dick, who knew, perhaps, rather more about the handling of dogs than the butcher himself, seized the animal firmly by neck and tail at the same moment, with one dexterous twist wrenched it off the body of the prostrate adversary, and, lifting it up in the air, hurled it on the pavement with such violence that it lay there with protruding tongue, stunned and breathless. His next movement was to pick up the Skye terrier, and, picking it up in his arms, he carried it tenderly and carefully back to its mistress.

But what was the butcher doing? While Dick marched off in triumph with the rescued animal, the butcher found his attention otherwise, and most seriously, occupied. One awful outburst of blasphemy had come from his lips as he saw the disaster that had overtaken his favourite, and, growling threats of vengeance to come, he had taken two steps in pursuit of Dick, when a powerful hand was laid on his shoulder, and he suddenly found himself brought up with a jerk that fairly made his teeth rattle in his head. And with that he turned round only to encounter the smiling face and formidable figure of Tom M'Gregor.

"You'll tread on some one's toes, my man, if you run about like that, and people sometimes turn crusty if their toes are trodden upon, and then you'll get smacked."

It was so quietly and deliberately said that the crowd,

ready enough to enjoy either the butcher's or any other man's discomfiture, now shouted with laughter.

"Where are you now, Billy, my boy?" shouted one of the butcher's late cordial supporters.

"Got a toughish job on, hain't you, old man?" shouted another; and indeed Billy now came in for a very choice selection of ironical compliments, the house being clearly with the bigger man than Billy.

Sullenly and sulkily the butcher had responded to Tom's rather forcible hint that he had better stop, sullenly and sulkily he now surveyed the figure of the man whose hand had caught him by the collar, and the longer he looked the more convinced he was that passive resistance or a conflict of words only was his wisest policy.

So now he growled out something that Tom interpreted to be an inquiry as to what right any one had to meddle with him and his "dug."

"I take it that your dug, as you call it, is something the same sort of beast as its master," answered Tom contemptuously,—"likes to take on something smaller than itself. Come now, friend butcher, just you step on down to the gymnasium with me and put on the gloves for ten minutes and I'll give you a five-pound note if you knock me down. You like a bit of sport, don't you?"

The offer was received with another round of applause from the crowd, and many were the voices that entreated Billy to "give the gentleman a show."

But the man, a rank coward at heart, only responded by an oath so hideous in character that every vestige of the smile vanished from M'Gregor's face.

"Look you here, my man," he said sternly, again getting a good grip of the butcher's collar, "we don't want any of that language. And I will give you a fair warning that if ever I pass this way and catch you or your filthy cur making nuisances of yourselves to your neighbours, I'll break the creature's neck first and then turn you over your own counter and smack you

soundly with your own cleaver,"—and he pushed the butcher from him with sufficient force to send the fellow tottering along the pavement backwards for some half-dozen yards, till, arriving at a convenient doorstep, he sat down with considerable discomfort. And there, until his assailant had fairly turned his back, the butcher thought it prudent to remain. Like other fallen idols, he found himself destitute of worshippers, and even the one congenial spirit who presently helped him to recover his feet and brush himself down proved little better than a Job's comforter.

"Seems to me, Bill, old man," he remarked sympathetically, "that the great red beggar" (he did not use the exact word) "meant business."

And for many a day and many a week the finger of fame, or in other words the very dirty digit of the very dirty street-boy, pointed out Tom M'Gregor as "yon girt red-haired man as were agoing to smack old Billy the butcher up agin St Giles," and urchins who only knew Billy by repute used to go and hover in anxious expectancy round his shop and pray that "yon girt red-haired man" would come along and afford them the gratification of seeing Billy's face under the operation.

Tom meanwhile, without making any attempt to acknowledge the tumultuous applause which had greeted his latest feat, and indeed without too carefully following the advice which he had lately offered to Billy as to the inexpediency of treading on people's toes, had forced his way through his numerous admirers and started in hot pursuit of Dick Loder, who was at once pointed out to him, by a ready sycophant, walking in the opposite direction to the Corn, still carrying the dog and accompanied by the two ladies.

Having rescued the younger lady's pet and received the due meed of valour in the form of the mistress's warmly expressed though somewhat tearful thanks, Dick had naturally volunteered to carry the little Skye for her, at any rate till it was sufficiently recovered from its shaking to walk.

"You can't carry it yourself, Miss—Miss——"

"Lauder," said the girl.

"Lauder! how funny! my own name is Loder. But you can't carry the poor little beast yourself, Miss Lauder. He'd spoil your frock in no time. He's all covered with dirt, and he's bleeding too—not hurt much though," as he saw the girl's lip quiver. "He'll be all right by to-morrow, but you must let me carry him for you. No, don't bother about my coat; it will brush off, and besides it's a very old one."

"Perhaps Mr Loder will come home with us, Elsie dear," suggested the old lady, who, having had her nerves considerably shaken by the late episode, was by no means sorry to have the assistance of a male escort. "Sir Henry's house is only a quarter of a mile farther on, and he will be so pleased to see you, and to give you a cup of tea, or something."

"Sir Henry's house?" exclaimed Dick, wondering if the girl, whose face he had just decided to be something more than ordinarily pretty, was prepared to second the invitation, and so looking at her as he spoke.

"Sir Henry Lauder," she explained: "he is my grandfather, and he will be so disappointed if he has no chance of thanking you, Mr Loder. Do please come."

It was not in human nature to decline so cordial an invitation coming from such a source, and Dick had walked on some way to his new acquaintances when he suddenly stopped short.

"Oh, by Jove," he exclaimed, "I forgot."

"I know, you had a friend with you. Surely that is him, walking behind us on the other side. Won't you bring him over, Mr Loder, and make him come too?"

"Don't know whether he will, but we can try at all events, Miss Lauder; but he is rather big to make, isn't he? I am afraid we can't quite carry him like we can Tory."

The party stopped, and as M'Gregor found that they were all looking in his direction, and evidently waiting for him to approach, he had no alternative but to stroll up and be formally introduced.

"You will come on to tea with us, won't you, Mr M'Gregor?" pleaded Elsie; "Mr Loder is coming, if you will."

"It's very kind of you, Miss Lauder, but you must let me run away directly after tea. I am by way of being on sort of duty this evening—not like Dick Loder there, who is a man of pleasure."

"How did you leave the butcher, Tom?" inquired Dick as they walked on. "I was so busy with the dogs that I forgot all about him."

"Oh, I think he was fairly comfortable when we parted, thank you. In fact, if I remember right, he had just taken a seat."

"A seat! where?" exclaimed Elsie, looking at him with open eyes, while Dick too looked puzzled for the moment and then burst out laughing.

"Well, on a doorstep, as a matter of fact, Miss Lauder. You know some people like sitting upon doorsteps—I don't myself as a matter of fact, but then people are, you know, so very different."

"I don't believe that he liked sitting on the doorstep at all. What does he mean, Mr Loder?" exclaimed Elsie, appealing to Dick, who was still laughing.

"Well, it sounds rather as if he had knocked him down, doesn't it?" and on hearing this the girl looked at M'Gregor with rather a startled air.

"I didn't do anything of the sort, I assure you, Miss Lauder. It would have served the brute right if I had, but I really did not. I only talked to him a bit, and told him what I might do some day if he didn't mend his ways, and then I gave him a little push, and then he thought he would like to sit down."

The description in itself was not very lucid, but it satisfied the girl.

"I think," she said, smiling as she looked at M'Gregor, "that he was a very wise butcher. A good many people would sit down if you talked to them and threatened them, and then gave them what perhaps you call a little push. I should not

like to have a little push from you at all, Mr M'Gregor; I should probably sit down and never get up again."

So talking they reached "Talavera," such being the title which an imaginative builder had chosen to bestow on the smart little villa which Sir Henry Lauder had for some years past rented on the Woodstock Road.

The face of the handsome old soldier, who, after a few words of introduction from his granddaughter, tendered to his visitors a cordial welcome and his hearty thanks for their timely assistance, was familiar to both young men, who having on more than one occasion met Sir Henry walking with the aid of a stout stick in the Parks, had been so far interested by his appearance as to make inquiries of one of the custodians as to his identity.

"Well, it's a Sir Henry something, but I can't put a name to him at this minute, gentlemen. My memory is all nohow, but he's a Sir right enough and a soldier, too, what fought at Inkerman or Waterloo or one of them outlandish places." But it came to Dick in the light of an agreeable surprise when, after a few minutes' conversation, Sir Henry suddenly inquired whether he was in any way connected with the Loder of Loders, and on receiving an answer in the affirmative then and there claimed him as a cousin.

"Cousins we are of a sort, my young sir," exclaimed the old gentleman,—"very distant, I grant you, and I don't think that I have ever exchanged a word with any member of the family. But my father always held out that he was a third or fourth cousin of the Loder of Loders of fifty years ago, and that either your branch of the family or ours spelt the name the wrong way out of what he called d—d contradictoriness. But anyhow you and I have some common ancestor of a later date than Adam, Mr Loder, and believe me I am very pleased to welcome my cousin to my house. Do you hear me, Elsie, you and Mr Loder are cousins!"

"I am sure I am very glad to hear it, sir. He has been a kind cousin to me to-day at all events."

"A little less than kin and more than kind," suggested Tom M'Gregor.

"Hang it all, sir, you've got it wrong somehow. Let's try back a bit. Oh dear me, no, that won't do at all," and for the moment Sir Henry looked rather nonplussed as he found that the original version was even less appropriate than M'Gregor's transposed edition—"less than kind, no, no, we can't have that, but I'm not going to give up my cousinship—more than kin and more than kind, too, and if you don't believe me, ask Tory there. Why, the dog recognises you as a member of the family already." For Tory, having on recovering his breath been allowed to run for the last fifty yards of the way to Talavera, had resolutely refused to leave Dick Loder's heels until he had been forcibly carried off by Sir Henry's servant, who commonly acted as valet to both dog and master, and having now been admitted to the drawing-room, the little animal had at once jumped on to his rescuer's lap and was making frantic efforts to lick his face.

"I think it is the kindness and not the kinsmanship that appeals to Tory," remarked Elsie; "I hope he is not bothering you very much, Mr Loder, but I have never seen him take to any stranger before,—not that," she added quickly, "he would not be a very ungrateful little thing if he did not take to you;" and Dick Loder happening at that moment to meet the girl's eyes, seemed to read in them something that told him that she wished him to understand that Tory's ideas and her own were in this instance identical. The little dog was very near to Elsie's heart, and as she watched him trying in his own language to express his feelings to his preserver, suddenly becoming conscious that her own eyes were again filling with tears as the thought of her poor pet's imminent peril came back to her, the girl rose hurriedly from her chair, and declaring that the sun, where she had been sitting, was too strong for her, seated herself in a remote corner of the room, and presently fell into conversation with M'Gregor.

"You and Miss Lauder seemed to find plenty to talk about,

Tom," remarked Dick later on when the two were on their way to the river.

"We only talked about one thing, as a matter of fact, and that was Dick Loder. If the girl is really your cousin, Dick, it would be only a kindness to trot her about a bit. Pretty cousins are scarce commodity, and I always think girls in the country have a precious dull time of it."

This advice from Mentor, entirely coinciding with Dick's inclination, afforded the young man sufficient excuse, if indeed any excuse was wanting, for paying frequent visits to Talavera; and finding that he was ever cordially welcomed both by Sir Henry and his granddaughter, he fell into the habit of generally looking in for a cup of tea on such afternoons as he happened to be practising at the nets. At a comparatively early stage of their acquaintance Miss Elsie and this young gentleman, whom her father had bade her regard in the light of cousin, so commonly availed themselves of the cousinly privilege of calling each other by their Christian name, that Miss Firchild, a duenna of rigid views on propriety though soft heart, conceived it to be her duty to mention the matter to Sir Henry.

"I told them to, my dear lady," he explained, "and I'm d—d glad they have taken the hint. They are only boy and girl after all, and they couldn't be expected to go on Lodering and Laudering each other all their lives. No, no, don't be nervous, my good soul," for something warned him that the lady was about to suggest further complications; "you need not be afraid that there will be any silly philandering. The more they get accustomed to feel as cousins, talk as cousins, and play as cousins, the more unlikely it is that there will be anything else between them. And who the deuce cares if there is, so there!"

Fortified by this assurance, the good lady went her way, and shortly discovered of her own observation that the two young people were on terms of such open and really cousin-like friendship, that her fears of what she had been pleased

to speak of as further complications were quite allayed, and there came a day when, greatly to her own surprise and to Elsie's amusement, she found herself following the example of the other members of the household, and addressing Mr Loder as Dick.

The ownership, or to be more accurate the part-proprietorship, of a pretty young cousin,—a distant cousin indeed, but still a cousin willing to be on comfortable and informal terms of relationship,—may be said to confer upon the undergraduate a certain degree of importance and respectability, and furthermore, if he do his duty in the way that he should, to saddle him with no small burden of responsibility. The latter Dick cheerily and joyously accepted without perhaps troubling his head too much about the former, and not only availed himself of Sir Henry's cordial invitations to look in whenever he was passing, but later on carried off Elsie and her duenna to watch the Eights from the St Hilary's barge as well as to see the other great sights of the May term.

And later still there came the crowning triumph of having his young cousin called for by Tom M'Gregor, and taken up to the Parks to witness Dick make his first appearance —a very successful first appearance too—in the ranks of the University Eleven. It was a lucky chance for Dick to be playing in the match at all. Things had not gone well with his cricket in the early weeks of term, and his name had in most quarters been struck off the list of likely candidates for the four vacant places. He had failed in the Seniors' match, and having on the strength of his school reputation been accorded further trials in the next Sixteen and the Perambulators *v.* Etceteras matches, had on both occasions declined to come off. But being temporarily banished to Cowley Marsh and other college grounds, he had found the weak college bowling so entirely to his liking that he piled up runs with almost unfailing regularity, and it became in those days, though it never had been so in times gone by, a very usual occurrence for St Hilary's to win their matches, and on such occasions

it was taken as a matter of course that Dick Loder should make his hundred.

"Why don't you give that fellow Loder a look-in?" some one inquired of the captain of the University Eleven; "he is a regular terror in college matches."

"He wasn't much of a terror in the Parks, anyhow; he had about as much idea of timing a ball as a scarecrow," and the subject languished.

But fortune, now inclined in sundry ways to make her peace with Dick Loder, did so ordain that the young man, who ought by all rights to have been attending a lecture, was sitting in the pavilion prepared to watch the M.C.C. match till luncheon-time, when, in the very first over bowled, a likely candidate for his Blue split his finger so badly in trying to stop hot drive that he was unable to take any further part in the match. Luckily for Dick that the Captain's eye lighted upon him.

"Would you mind fielding for a few overs for us, Loder?" he said, approaching the pavilion rails. And then, seeing the shade of disappointment which came over the face of the St Hilary's man, who had looked up eagerly at the sound of his own name, he suddenly changed his mind and added, "In fact, I think you had better play altogether, if you don't mind."

Mr Loder did not mind at all; on the contrary, within ten minutes he had changed and taken up his position at a rather deep extra mid-off, and there, in the first over after lunch, attracted the favourable notice of the manager of the visiting side, himself an old Oxford captain, who was batting at the time. Having played a ball slowly, rather wide of Dick, the batsman, having not yet gauged the quality of the new fieldsman, was standing out of his ground a little uncertain whether to run, when Dick solved the difficulty for him by a return so sharp and accurate that it hit the top of the middle stump, and there was a general appeal. It was a clear case of a close race between bat and ball, but the umpire's verdict was in favour of the batsman.

"A bit narrow, wasn't it?" observed the wicket-keeper to the batsman, as the umpire was readjusting the stumps.

"Almost too narrow," was the answer, followed by the question, "Who is that fellow?"

"Loder of Hilary's."

And the M.C.C. captain not only paid especial attention to Loder of Hilary's during the rest of his own innings, but cautioned one or two of the batsmen who succeeded him to be chary about running to that fieldsman.

"He runs like a hare and throws like a fiend." Such was the form in which the advice was given, and an incident that occurred a little later proved that the great judge of the game was pretty well right. The big hitter of the M.C.C. side, having in two overs fairly broken the heart of the fast bowler, was being treated to a dose of slows, and Dick had been sent, still on the off-side, to the far end of the ground away from the pavilion. The very first ball of the new bowler's over caught fair and square in the middle of the bat, hummed through the air some two or three yards wide of the bowler's left hand, and the batsman trotted leisurely down the pitch, turned, and was preparing to walk leisurely back again, and then, suddenly aware that the fieldsman in the country had by a marvellous effort of agility saved the boundary, he quickened up into a stately trot.

"Look out, your end!" yelled the opposite batsman, but the warning came too late. Fair and square at first bound came the ball just over the top of the stumps at the pavilion end, and before he had time to realise the danger or materially quicken his pace, the great man found himself run out by two yards.

"I told you to look out for that fellow," remarked the captain, as the batsman, preceded by his bat, entered the pavilion.

"You didn't tell me that he was a sort of ubiquitous beast who could throw a mile," retorted the victim, as he picked up his bat and retired growling to the dressing-room. He found still further cause to resent Mr Loder's ubiquity, when, in the

second innings on the third morning of the match, that fieldsman brought off his second brilliant catch in the outfield on the very first occasion that the hitter fairly opened his shoulders.

"It ought to have been six—it would have been six—if that d—d fellow hadn't caught it," growled the discomfited batsman.

The observation was so far justifiable, insomuch as the ball would no doubt have pitched beyond the boundary if Mr Loder had not put his hands in the way at a rather critical moment.

The rival but friendly captains of the two opposing sides dined together that night at Vincent's, and when they found themselves alone in the club late on in the evening, the present captain invited his companion's advice on the subject of filling up the vacancies in the team.

There was no doubt about the first eight places.

"And then that fellow Loder, of course," said the past master in the art of choosing a side.

"Loder? Why Loder? He can't bat for nuts," exclaimed the other.

"Can't bat for nuts, can't he? Well, he can field for nuts then. Why, why, good fellow, he is a long way the best out-field you've got. He'll save as many runs as half your fellows will get. Of course ours was a rotten side to-day, and you won on your merits right enough, but look," and, drawing over the evening paper, he pointed to the score of the match. "He," this was the big hitter, "got a hundred against you last week, didn't he?"

"Well, yes, he did," admitted the other.

"And on the wicket we had on Monday, or to-day either, for the matter of that, he might just as well have got them again; only, there you are, 'caught Loder,' and a devilish fine catch, too, and that run-out was as smart a thing as I ever saw in my life. Nine men out of ten would have thrown to the wrong end, and you or I, old chap, couldn't have thrown half-way to either. You'll have to play Loder."

"I say," exclaimed the other man, as a sudden thought occurred to him, "that was a closish shave of yours, first innings, wasn't it?"

"Very close," responded the M.C.C. captain with a grim smile; "so close that I'd have had to go if your umpire hadn't over-eaten himself at lunch. That's the worst of these second-class umpires; they're all right in the morning, but then they gorge themselves at lunch, and either go to sleep for an hour afterwards or—well, are very vulgar. It didn't matter much, as it turned out in the long-run; but if I had been in your place, and had lost the match, I'd have either fed the fellow on the bread of affliction on match-days or sacked him after the match."

"He was a bit of an ass," replied the other, laughing, "but I take it one has no more right to muzzle that creature any more than the other. But you really think I had better play Loder?"

"I've no doubt about it," pronounced the M.C.C. captain decisively, "and I say, old fellow," again referring to the score on the paper, "you said he could not bat for nuts—well, he got eleven and wasn't out anyhow. Of course there was nothing to play against by that time, but if you send a fellow in eighth wicket and he is not out, you can't expect him to do much more, can you? And, by Jove! I remember now he did make a lovely cut—came past me like a flash of lightning and was at the boundary in no time. I let it go, but I daresay the young beggar would have stopped it himself. He does stop them well, and no mistake. Can he bowl at all by any chance?"

"Stuff of a sort, I believe," answered the other carelessly; "not sure that he didn't get a wicket in the Seniors, two perhaps. But he wasn't in long."

"Well, stuff of a sort that has got a wicket is better than no stuff at all; not that there aren't plenty of your stuff of a sort bowlers about nowadays. Anything, though, for a change; and a man who can send down a ball at all may get a wicket

at Lord's. I got one once there myself, though you mightn't believe it."

"Clean bowled, eh?"

"No, caught—caught off the umpire's hind-leg, and serve him deuced well right for getting it in the way. It ought to have been four, but it wasn't: the fellow had to go."

The upshot of this conversation was that Dick Loder was taken on tour, and having, in addition to fielding brilliantly, knocked up a very timely thirty against Lancashire, was awarded his colours, and furthermore distinguished himself at Lord's when he made a plucky but ineffectual effort to save the match.

CHAPTER XIV.

RUSTIC CRICKET—JOHN MARTIN.

I WISH that the other fellow would do his work himself and not turn me on to write his cricket chapters for him. However, it is no manner of use to try and argue with him, and as I have to write, I would sooner write about cricket than about any other subject.

I am an old cricketer myself, very much behind the times of course, and I still hold to the idea that I had in more active days—an idea, I may say, that I have inherited from my forefathers—that there is no game in the world that can hold a candle to cricket, no outdoor occupation so improving to the mind and invigorating to the body. Here let me remark that I thus speak of cricket as regarded in the light of a pastime. For, to my mind at all events, cricket, like any other game, when it ceases to be a pastime and is adopted as a profession—whether an openly paid or a *sub rosâ* paid profession, or even an unpaid profession—must lose its charms. However, I am not going to discuss the question of professionalism in cricket or in ball games generally. I will simply say that I love most ball-games, cricket in particular, and that I hate professionals as a class, though I will not deny that I have met with many very worthy, nay, I will even say very charming individuals, who pass as professional cricketers.

Once, only once, never again please, I went to see what they

are pleased to call an international cricket match, — a very interesting sight, no doubt, to thousands of the spectators; to myself, alas! vanity and vexation of spirit. In my ignorance or my old-fashioned—what the Yankees call—"cussedness," I had fancied that the ball was meant to hit the wicket and the bat to hit the ball, but I give you my word of honour that I saw a good many overs bowled in which nothing was hit at all but either the wicket-keeper's hands or the batsman's leg, which he apparently put in the way on purpose.

"Why don't they change the bowling?" I asked my nephew, who had tempted me to accompany him to watch the match.

"Oh, but he is bowling too beautifully, Uncle John; he is bowling with his head."

"And is the other fellow batting with his head?" I asked.

"Well, yes, in a way he is, you know." All those young fellows nowadays seem to end up their remarks with "you know." "Don't you see how he is watching the ball?"

"Why doesn't he come and sit here and watch it then? He has kicked it twice, and that is all I have seen him do for the last ten minutes. There! he tried to kick it again!"

"Ah!" said my companion, "I'm afraid, my dear uncle, that you don't appreciate the nice points of the game. It's a funny game, this first-class cricket, you know."

"More dull than funny," I snapped, and then the conversation languished, and so too did I.

No, no, when I go to watch what they call first-class cricket, give me the University match, when those boys, or at any rate some of them, do hit hard and often, and look like so many cats in the field. Or give me my own village green, where Bill Tomkins really does hit the ball, and George Harris really does bowl at the wickets, and nearly every lad on our side can hold a high catch even though the safe holding thereof seems to depend upon a certain rather nasty and yet in some circles apparently necessary preliminary.

"Whoy, I counted as you were agoing to drop her, Harry," remarked our umpire one fine day to a deeply mortified young

butcher who had allowed a catch to slip through his hands; "you never spit on your hands, lad."

Now I am not going to pretend that our village side contains many cricketers of very high class, but take them as they go they are a very useful cut-and-come-again lot, fine upstanding, broad-shouldered young fellows, who hit the ball hard when it is crooked, and block it—I like that word "block," though it is a bit out of date—when it is straight. My belief in the efficacy of cricket as a means of keeping the young fellows in the village in a wholesome state of mind and body must be held to justify a resolution that I have long since made, never to engage a curate who has not some pretensions to be called a cricketer, though I am not quite prepared to go so far as to say the better the cricketer the better the curate. I am, however, perfectly certain that our lads pay more attention to the words of wisdom which we hope to hear from our pulpit if the preacher has shown himself to be a man of whom account is to be taken in the cricket-field, and by far and away the most useful curate I have ever had in the place was George Higgins of Oriel, who on one and the same day made a hundred runs against Longcross, and then collared an itinerant vagabond who persisted in polluting the atmosphere with his foul tongue, and carried him out of the field by his waistband.

"There, my man," remarked George as he dropped the fellow into a heavy ditch, "you had better stop there and wash your mouth out."

Poor George went out as a missionary later on, and I can promise you that there was not a man or a woman in our parish who did not in one way or another show his or her grief when the news of his untimely death reached us.

Now I want you to take these remarks of mine as a sort of introduction to an account of our "grand" cricket match, and in the event of my description of what was a very notable event in the modest history of my village club being at all wearisome or lengthy I will pray you to remember that I regard proficiency in this noble and manly game as a great aid

to sober, cleanly, and godly living, and that I take a quasi-paternal pride in the doings of my own parochial geese, who do not of their own conceit profess themselves to be swans, and yet are not—so at least their pastor thinks—in any way worthy to be classified among the ugly ducklings of Society. I have borrowed the term "Grand Match" from our local paper, which I happen to have by me; and indeed, as we generally have been content to measure our strength with neighbouring villages, our match against the town of Barksworth is an event much to be remembered in the annals of our village. The challenge to play a match had emanated from Barksworth, and was couched in terms which would have made a refusal sound ungracious.

"We hear," wrote the secretary, "that you have a very good club, and as many of our members would like to see your pretty village we hope you may be able to see your way to arranging a home-and-home fixture with us."

Well, on due consideration we decided to give the Barksworth folk only the half—to be sure it was the better half—of the cake they had asked for, not only from the feeling that two grand matches in one season might have a demoralising effect upon our lads, and might even tempt some of them to believe that cricket playing was an over-serious business, but because it occurred to me that a match played upon the racecourse of a smoky and cobbler-ridden town might be fraught with more harm than good to an essentially rural eleven. It refreshes the townsman to have an occasional day out in the fresh and open country, but it by no means follows that the country cousin is improved by a visit to the town. If the mountain so wished it, it was welcome to come to Mahomet, but this Mahomet of mine had no intention of going to the mountain.

It had been mutually agreed between the two high contracting parties that in consideration of the fact that ours was only a village club, and that the Barksworth side was likely to include not only their ground bowler but one or two other

paid men as well, we should be allowed to play a stray visitor or two by way of equalising matters. I have lost touch—ah me! how quickly one does lose that touch—with the cricket world, but fortunately I recollected that a year or two back, on the evening after Charles Ingram's wedding, that nice young fellow M'Gregor, who had been interested in my account of my village lads, had promised to pay me a visit some time in the dim future. And I remembered, too, that in the course of our conversation I had elicited the fact that he had graduated as a cricketer in the Loretto School eleven before his evil genius had led him to join the slaves of the oar at Oxford University. So now I boldly put pen to paper and wrote *vid* Big Holmes to M'Gregor, asking him if he would come and play for me himself, and if possible bring with him a friend who could play a bit and would not turn up his nose at such accommodation as an elderly country parson could give him.

I wrote my letter early in the year, and as M'Gregor happened to be staying up at Oxford I got an answer almost by return of post. Like the good fellow that I felt sure he was, M'Gregor undertook to come and play for me himself, and, if possible, to bring a companion. And a few days before the Grand Match, which it is hardly necessary to say was arranged for the August Bank Holiday, I had a card from him.

"I am bringing Dick Loder with me on Saturday. You will like him."

It was a short, sweet, and satisfactory communication. But who in the name of wonder was Dick Loder?

"Loder?" I said to myself, "Loder, why, it's surely impossible, but——" and I felt in my pocket for the card of the University match. Of course the card was not there, as I had, according to custom, worn frock-coat No. 2 at Lord's, but Mary soon found it for me.

"R. L. Loder." Yes, there was his name as large as life, and I can tell you my heart gave a jump as I read it. For was not this young Loder the one boy out of the whole twenty-two

playing at Lord's whom I really seemed to know by sight, and whose face I was not likely to forget in a hurry? I am not going to say that he was the best cricketer who played in that match, or, for the matter of that, anywhere near the best, but I will vow that he was the lad whom I would rather have in my heart and on my side than any other I could name; a lad who played hard to win, and lost like—well, like a gentleman, as I dare swear he is.

What a good match it was, anybody's match one might have called it, though it turned out to be Cambridge's, as a matter of fact,—only by twenty runs though! And there in the fourth innings was that young Loder, playing up like a Trojan to the very end, and then miserably run out by a fat-bodied and thick-headed wicket-keeper. I never did wholly love any wicket-keeper in my life, and now I don't suppose that I shall ever love one; necessary evils I call them, doubly necessary, I suppose, in these modern days when every bowler, straight or crooked, dispenses with the services of a long-stop. My own idea of them is that directly they have finished with their wicket-keeping they ought to be packed up in a glass case and kept dry for the next match. For only one in a dozen of them seems to have any notion of making a run, and even then he is the most aggravating beast in creation to be in with.

Only twenty runs to win and one wicket to fall! Loder, who could bat a bit and was playing coolly and confidently, at one end; at the other that fellow the wicket-keeper, ungainly, fat, and cumbrous, about as much good with a bat in his hand as I should be with a golf-stick. Young Loder had just placed the last ball of the slow bowlers over on the outside for a certain single, called, and ran half-way down the pitch, and then that other creature, who was fast asleep and dreaming, suddenly woke up and sent him back, and the lad slipped, and it was all over. I very nearly ran out myself and thrashed the wicket-keeper with my umbrella; and Big Holmes, who was sitting with me in his big frock-coat, said "d—n" out loud, so

loud indeed that our bishop's wife, who, as ill-luck would have it, was sitting in the row in front of us some six places down, turned right round and adjusted her pince-nez in order to identify the evil-minded person with whom I, a rural dean, if you please, was consorting. If it had been my dear lord I should not have been half so much disturbed, for he is ever charitable and prone to make allowance for the shortcomings of the male sex; but the lady is a far more bishopy individual than her right reverend husband. There was, however, no time to remonstrate, for Holmes, having thus vented his feelings, gripped me by the arm and dragged me out to join the crowd that was surging towards the pavilion entrance to clap young Loder, just as if that could do him any good. The boy had got forty runs, and got them well too: a bit shaky at the start, but a rare good innings for a young hand at a crucial point of the match. He did not care a bit about the applause—he was thinking of the match, and had got close to the pavilion without looking up; and as I took stock of him I could see that he was biting his lip hard. But just then one of the Cambridge men, I am not sure that it was not the captain, overtook him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"Well played, Loder; real bad luck, I call it!"

I have no doubt that the young fellow meant well, but I herewithal make this my humble confession that in my own younger days, when the blood ran faster than it does now, if at a moment when I was hot, out of conceit with my luck, and a beaten man into the bargain, a successful rival had patted me on the back and offered me a condolence, I, such is my evil temper, should have had hard work to restrain myself from knocking him down then and there.

But not so this young fellow — my conscience, what a thorough sportsman he showed himself to be! His face cleared in a moment, and out went his hand.

"I congratulate you, old chap," he said with a smile; "it was a good win, and a good match too, wasn't it?"

"You'll do, my boy," I muttered to myself, for, like that

party in our old Latin grammar, "Video meliora proboque," though I am with him too in "deteriora sequor."

"Yes," said the Cantab, "but I wish we had won any other way but that. It was very hard lines on you."

"Oh, it was my own fault, I expect. I ought to have remembered that old Solly was not much of a traveller."

"Bosh, my dear fellow, it was a run and a half. Why, I fielded the ball myself, and never thought about trying to save the run till I saw him standing there like a stuck pig, and then I began to bustle," and so those two passed on into the pavilion.

Then I fell foul of Holmes.

"Holmes," I said to him quite seriously, as we walked off the ground, "you have disgraced me for ever. Do you know that that was my bishop's wife who looked round at us?"

"Sorry for your bishop then, old man," he replied; "she is a plain party, and queer-tempered too, I should say. I thought she was Harrod's wife, and so I winked at her. Hard lines on you, old Martin, too, but never mind. If the bishop hauls you over the coals, you may say that it was me. That is the worst of not having one's spectacles on," and here he readjusted those aids to vision which during the progress of the match he had discarded in favour of a pair of opera-glasses especially purchased for the occasion. "I never can tell those pug-nosed women of a certain age apart. But, upon my honour, it was enough to make a saint swear, let alone a College bursar. Why, that young Loder is one of our men, a good lad too, and I only came up to see him play. We have not had a Hilary's man in the Eleven for ten years, and I didn't come all this way to see him run out by a turnip-headed Goth. That is the worst of your beastly game: one man makes an ass of himself and a good fellow has to suffer. But there, there, that is always the way. We had—but of course you didn't know him," and Big Holmes suddenly came to a dead stop after delivering the longest oration that ever to my personal knowledge came from his lips, and having blown his nose loudly, lapsed into silence.

Thus, as you see, I had had what I may call a sort of pre-

liminary vision of the young man who was shortly to be my guest, and I was predisposed to like him.

He and Tom M'Gregor — somehow or other I insensibly dropped into the habit of calling him Tom after a very brief acquaintance—arrived in the course of the Saturday afternoon, and soon made themselves very much at home in my modest bachelor establishment, satisfied, or giving themselves out as satisfied, with everything, though young Loder kept me on tenterhooks for the first half hour by playing with my parrot, a bird well-warranted to bite ninety-nine men out of a hundred.

"Oh, I always play with parrots, sir," he replied, laughing; when I suggested that a parrot's bite was not exactly the best preparation for a cricket match, "You won't bite me, will you Polly, old girl?" and he went on scratching her head without looking at her, a thing that I had never ventured to do myself after a ten years' acquaintanceship. And, indeed, so long as he kept his hand in the cage, the bird was on her very best behaviour, though the hostile demonstrations which she made when either M'Gregor or myself approached the cage proved that, so far as the world at large was concerned, Miss Polly was no more amiably disposed than usual. Before he had been quite an hour in the house, I found my young friend sitting on the stairs and taking a lesson in the art of sewing on buttons from my sedate and rather stand-off Mary. He did not seem to be the least bit in the world disconcerted at my appearance.

"Awfully kind of Mary, isn't it, Mr Martin?" he remarked. "She offered to do it for me herself, but, as I tell her, my cricket shirts are always shedding buttons in impossible places, and I haven't got any sisters to teach me the way I should go, and so I am taking a lesson now I've got the chance. Thanks awfully, Mary—three or four twists and a bite and that finishes it, does it? Right we are, Mary. And now I am going to smoke a pipe in your garden if I may, Mr Martin: I must tackle your gardener and see if he can tell me anything about those up-to-date potatoes." At eleven o'clock that night,

when I dismissed the young gentleman to bed with a couple of glasses of old Trinity port, which he had drunk soberly and reverently according to its merits, under his waistband, I had quite made up my mind that whatever way our "grand" match on the Monday went, one Richard Loder bade well to be a popular personage on our village-green. There was not the least particle of affection or—as I believe the young men of the present day prefer to call it—"side" in his whole composition.

"Nice lad that," I remarked to M'Gregor; "I am very much obliged to you for bringing him."

"Yes, he'll do," was the reply. "He only wants more purpose in his life to make him one of the very best."

A good sound fellow this Tom M'Gregor,—sensible too. I can quite understand why my dear Charles thinks so highly of him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAND MATCH.

Now, if there is one person beyond all others whose face I dearly love to see on our cricket-ground, that person is old George Peters. Old George, as the saying goes in our part of the world, knows his way about a cricket-ground as well, or perhaps rather better, "nor here a one and there a one." He was, I have been told, a fine player himself in his day; but as he is a good twenty years my senior, I cannot testify to his prowess as a cricketer of my own personal experience. One thing, however, I may readily avouch, and that is that friend George is a real good judge of the game, and I would as soon take his opinion as to the merits of a rising player as that of any other man of my acquaintance. Before he came and settled down in our part of the world with what he is pleased to call "a small competency," he had kept a grocer's shop somewhere in the neighbourhood of St John's Wood, and I have it on his own authority that he spent more time in the ring at Lord's watching the great matches than behind the counter during the summer months. After he had finally doffed his apron and retired upon that competency, he generally spent the major part of the months of May and June in a prolonged visit to a brother who kept, and still keeps, a tobacconist's shop in the Corn-market at Oxford, and there passed his afternoons in watching cricket in Cowley Marsh, or on the old Magdalen

ground, or, later on, in the Parks. And he could tell you as well as any man I know, not only the prospects that Oxford had of winning or losing the 'Varsity match, but the merits and defects of the captain for the year as a selector of the very best available side.

"It's like this, Reverend," he once remarked to me, "there's hardly a man going as haven't got a bee in his bonnet somewhere. And these young Oxford captains, they each has their own especial bee of their own, year after year come as regular as may be. I should just like to say to one of them, You choose your first nine men, my hearty, as there can't be no mistake about, and I'll pick the last two, and then we wouldn't have no more of they blessed bees buzzing about Lord's."

Now, I saw that my worthy old friend had planted his folding-chair in his own particular corner of the ground, where he commanded a good view of the game and could watch it without being disturbed by the ignorant comments and noisy observations of the holiday crowd. So I told my man to take my own chair to the same place and to warn Mr Peters that I proposed to join him.

"Morning, Reverend," he exclaimed as I approached him; "fine day, isn't it? Are you going to serve it pretty warm for them?"

"Well, I've got a couple of fellows from Oxford, George; I wonder if you know either of them."

"So I heard tell. Now let's see what they're made on," and he levelled his glasses at a group who were standing near the scoring tent.

"What!" he suddenly exclaimed, "you ain't got a rowing match on in place of cricket, have you? For if that ain't that there M'Gregor a-talking to the curate—well, all I can say is as I'm a Dutchman born and bred."

I at once reassured the worthy George on the point of his nationality by telling him that it was M'Gregor, and that I had it on that gentleman's own authority that in former days he had played in his school eleven.

"Well, I've never seen him go a-cricketing anyhow," responded Peters, "but I don't say as he can't play, as I don't know nothing about it, whether he can or whether he can't. But I'll tell you what he can do, Reverend, and that is wash a chap as has gotten on a dirty tongue. It were four years ago, or it may have been five, that I were standing on the river bank at Oxford just afore you come to what they calls the Guts—though why they give a place such a ugly name I'm sure I can't tell you. Well, and M'Gregor he were there and all, standing just as he might be standing now, with his hands in his pockets, and waiting for a boat—the Leander boat it were—as he was going to run alongside of. Well, we were waiting about there a bit, not standing alongside each other quite, but half-a-dozen yards apart or more. Up comes four chaps—they sort of loafing chaps, you knows them, Reverend—and they stands a few yards back, and presently they begins a-letting fly with their tongues as horrid a lot of language as ever I heard in my born days: it were d— this and b— that, and all about nothing. Well, I sees M'Gregor as he don't like it; he keeps hitching this way and hitching that, and he looks at them once or twice over his shoulder, but he don't say nothing. So at last I speaks to one of them quite civil-like, and I asks him to stop. 'You see as the gentleman don't like it,' I said. 'Then he can something well lump it,' he says, and with that he starts off on me. But before he can get what you wouldn't call properly agoing, that M'Gregor he just takes one step, picks him up with one hand afore he knows where he is quite, and chucks him, same as you or me might chuck a puppy-dog, into four feet of water.

"'You can do the lumping, my man,' he says very quiet, 'and the washing too.'

"Well, the chap he goes right to the bottom, as he'd thrown him on his back, and the other chaps they lets on something about summonsing.

"'May as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb,' he says, and he winks at me. 'Now then, clear out the lot of you,' he

says, turning round on them that sharp, 'I'll drown the next,' and he just makes one step and off they goes as hard as their legs will carry them, and the chap as had just crawled out of the water, no sooner as he hears something about drowning than off he sets running the other way and hollering murder at the top of his voice. Well, then, I just said to him, 'And if there was anything to come of that summonsing, I'll come and bear witness for you in welcome, sir; that's one of my brother Isaac's cards, as is a tobacconist in Corn-market, and my name George, and I'm staying with him.' 'What!' says he, 'are you old Ikey Peters' brother? Why, he sells the worst tobacco in Oxford and the dearest,' and he goes off into a great laugh.

"But for all that he never sees me without passing the time of day to me. That's that M'Gregor."

I am afraid that I did not laugh at the story so much as I might have done if it had not reminded me as it did of my dear old curate, Higgins of Oriel. It was so very like what he did himself, as I told you, here in our cricket-ground, having the same dislike to coarse and vulgar language that Tom M'Gregor evidently has,—a dislike, may I say so, characteristic of these big, quiet-mannered men, who will go miles out of their way to avoid hurting a child's feelings even, and yet chastise profanity and coarseness with firm and relentless hand.

But George Peters easily passed over my apparent lack of appreciation of his yarn, having at that moment again had recourse to his opera-glasses, which he now held to his eyes for the space of quite five minutes, at the end of which time he abruptly removed them, and putting one hand on my knee, indulged in a hearty chuckle.

"Why, Reverend," he gurgled out as well as his chuckling fit would allow him, "if you haven't been and got that there blessed little Loder!"

"Oh, you know him," I said, not a little amused. "Do you think he will do?"

"Do? who's agoing to do if he don't with all the bowling as he's like to have to-day? Let's see, there's John Horrocks,

he's captain, so he's sure to do more bowling than any one else on the side. And there's," and he rapidly ticked off two or three names on his fingers. To be sure I had never heard of any one of them before, but I looked as wise as I could under the circumstances. "Now look you here, Reverend," he resumed when he had apparently exhausted his list of probable or possible bowlers, "don't you make no mistake and say afterwards that I mistold you. If it were Jack Hearne, or our Albert, or Tom Richardson, or Johnnie Briggs, as were agoing to bowl, I ain't agoing to say as I wouldn't pick four or five of they Oxford boys as wouldn't do you better. But you come down to what I calls college bowling, something as comes along plain and easy, such as we'll see here to day, and I says give me that there blessed little Loder, and you may pick who you will, Gunns and Graces and Lions too." (I fancy he meant an Australian celebrity, but at the moment I took it as the plural of the beast.)

"Well, I'm very glad to hear your opinion, George," I said; "I hope you are right."

"Hush, mum is the word, Reverend. There is John Horrocks coming along. You just leave him to me."

"Good morning, Mr Peters," exclaimed the rather stout and pursy individual who now strolled up. "Good morning, sir," as he politely raised his cap, "I think you are Mr Martin," and he held out his hand. "It is very kind of you to let us come, Mr Martin," he was affable enough to remark; "we always enjoy a day's outing. Perhaps you are going to give us a day's outing, too, as your side has won the toss, and I am told you have two gentlemen from Oxford."

There was just that suspicion of politely veiled irony in his tone which made me sure that he was pretty confident of holding the trump card in his hand.

However, I had no opportunity of replying, as George Peters, evidently mistrustful of my powers of discretion, at once took up the running on his own account.

"Look you here, John, my boy," he said, catching hold of

the other man's sleeve. "You see yon big man standing by that tent?" Horrocks nodded. "And you see that he's gotten on a dark-blue coat?" Another nod. "Well, then, I'll tell you something as perhaps you mayn't know. They don't give them dark-blue coats at Oxford to men as don't either play cricket or else row for what they calls the 'Varsity, so there! Fine day for cricket as you was a-saying, Mr Martin," and as at this moment the starting bell rang, Horrocks hurried off to marshal his men into the field.

Young Loder, having divested himself of his coat of many colours and donned his pads and gloves, walked gaily to the wicket with the curate, and at twelve o'clock punctually the game began. The man Horrocks, as George had predicted, led off the attack at one end, bowling straight, and, as it seemed to me, rather over-pitched slows, while the fast slinger at the other end by way of equalising matters seldom pitched a ball much more than half-way. Alas! poor stuff as it all looked, it proved good enough and to spare for my young yokels, who were, I trow, a little overweighted by the burden of the responsibility of taking in hand the best eleven in the district. My worthy curate managed to scrape up seven runs out of the first ten before he was clean bowled by Horrocks, who caught and bowled the next batsman in the same over. Two for ten did not look too promising, but M'Gregor's arrival put a new aspect on the game. In ten minutes he had knocked up thirty runs by clean and powerful, if not, perhaps, scientific hitting. But after lifting the slow bowler clean out of the ground amidst roars of applause, he mistimed the very next ball and was easily caught at cover-point, whereupon John Horrocks threw his red cap high in the air, turned two somersaults with an agility that was really nothing short of marvellous for a man of his figure, and then ran off to the refreshment-tent to get a drink. To cut a long story short, at luncheon-time the figures on the telegraph board were 76, 6, 1.

But what was my young friend Mr Loder doing all the time?—"that there blessed little Loder," from whom I had

been led to expect so much. Well, he was not out certainly, and that was about all one could say on that point, and in nearly an hour and a-half he had scooped up twenty-seven runs, which with Tom's thirty, the curate's seven, and half-a-dozen extras, didn't leave a very large slice of pudding for my poor village lads to share among them. But I cannot say that Master Loder's methods had impressed me at all favourably; in fact, he did not look at all like the same batsman I had seen at Lord's a month back. There, at all events, he had stood upright and handled his bat as if he knew something about it. But to-day he had assumed a cramped and crouching attitude, tumbling about over his wicket, stopping the ball at the very last moment as if by the merest accident, and twice at any rate being so very nearly bowled by John Horrocks that the latter held up his hands, whistled so that you could hear him all over the ground, and on the second occasion nearly knocked down mid-off in his anxiety to peer round the outside of Loder's bat in order to satisfy himself that the off-stump was really standing. The whole performance indeed was so mysterious and, I will even add, so mortifying to myself, that I watched it all in silence and enjoyed nothing at all during the whole hour and a-half except, perhaps, the warm sunshine — well, yes, and M'Gregor's hitting. And there sat old George Peters beside me with his opera-glasses glued to his eyes, only expressing his feelings by occasional inarticulate grunts, and one long fit of suppressed chuckling, brought upon apparently by the sight of the man Horrocks's acrobatic display. As soon as he heard the sound of the luncheon bell, and saw the umpires remove the bails, he pocketed his glasses, turned to me, and whispered loudly, "That there blessed little Loder! They ain't seen his back yet."

Having my own views as to the style and the soundness of Mr Loder's display, I was not going to be provoked into pretending even to share his evident enthusiasm, so I made no reply.

Then came another very loud whisper from Peters.

"Ain't he a-nursing of them well, just so as if it might have been a baby?"

"I wish he'd take a turn at spanking his baby just by way of a change," I replied with, I fear, a touch of some asperity in my voice. At any rate—we had now commenced to walk across the field in the direction of the luncheon-tent—George Peters stopped quite short and eyed me all over with some interest.

"And you a clergyman too, and should be an example of patience and humanity. Reverend, I'm downright shocked. And now let's go and have our belly-timber."

I thought this rather a vulgar form of hint that we were delaying the cricketer's lunch, but at this juncture we were interrupted by Mr Horrocks and a fat friend whom he introduced as John Sharpe, "best wicket-keeper in England," so that I had no opportunity of calling my friend Peters to order. Horrocks was most affable, not to say complacently triumphant.

"In our club, Mr Martin, Mr Sharpe and me, we goes by the names of Big John and Little John: he can give me four inches most ways, can't you, John? And how many wickets was it as we counted the two Johns had quietused of this season, as was stumped or caught by Big off Little—seven-and-twenty, wasn't it?"

Big John, who seemed to be of a somewhat more taciturn nature than his cheery comrade, grunted what I took to be an affirmative.

"Fine hitter your great Oxford gent, Mr Peters; magnificent I calls him," now remarked Horrocks in generous appreciation of Tom M'Gregor's innings, "and it were a fine ball as got him, just an 'arf inch more break as he'd counted on. Fine ball, weren't it, John?" and Big John ejaculated "Wonnerful!"

"And I calls, why, what it is—well-a-nigh on eighty runs—a very tidy score for your eleven to make against our bowling, Mr Martin. And only six wickets down and another as near as may be twice over or three times, so we'll call it a hundred or a hundred and ten all told, for I reckon you've got a tail same

as most elevens; not as we've got much of a one ourselves, but elevens in general do have a tail, don't they, Mr Martin?"

I had it in my mind to remark, as indeed it looked on paper, that the head of our eleven was yet to appear, but as, alas! I knew full well to the contrary, I hardly liked to do so.

"Well, a hundred is what I call a very tidy score, Mr Martin," he was kind enough to observe; "not as I don't hope that we'll go one better ourselves. Me and Big John here, we made sixty-seven afore we was parted the other day, didn't us, John?"

And from this I gathered that my communicative friend, in virtue of his position as captain, not only kept up one end of the bowling most of an innings, but also went in first for his side.

I sat, as has always been my custom, at one end of the table, and the lively Mr Horrocks was two places down on my left, and beyond him again that very attractive young gentleman, Mr Loder. It always pleases me to see two lions of the mimic fight colloguing like two lambs when the battle is over, or during the luncheon interval, and I now perceived what I had even remarked on the ground that these two were on excellent terms with each other, talking and laughing incessantly.

Once indeed Mr Horrocks addressed a pretty compliment to Tom M'Gregor, who was sitting next to George Peters about the middle of the table on the opposite side.

"I don't think as I ever saw a finer hit in my life, sir, than that as you made just before the ball as I got you."

And M'Gregor, being at the time engaged in earnest conversation with his neighbour, answered politely indeed, but missed an evident opportunity of alluding to the excellence of the fatal ball, which I could see was a matter of disappointment to the bowler, who presently found consolation in listening to young Loder.

"I say, Mr Horrocks," observed the latter, as he helped himself to gooseberry tart — never, I think, a wise thing for a man who has to bat within a quarter of an hour to do—

"don't you think it is about time that you changed the bowling at your end?"

"Well, what was you pleased to think yourself, sir?" answered Horrocks with a wink, intended, I believe, for Big John's edification. Unfortunately it missed fire.

"It is hardly for me to say, is it?" responded Mr Loder smilingly. "But I think it's rather hard on some people if you go on all the time. You should really give a fellow a chance."

"Ah, I thought I'd got you twice over this morning, young sir; I wonder what you was a-thinking of yourself."

"Thinking that I should have to hit you if you went on like that. I think I shall hit you after lunch, Mr Horrocks."

"Hit 'em or play 'em as you will. It's all one to John Horrocks."

The remark was made in rather a loud voice, and accompanied by a second wink, more successful than the first, for now Big John favoured the company with a hoarse guffaw. And just at the same moment old George Peters, having his head buried in a tankard of ale, must have allowed some of the liquor to go the wrong way, for he suddenly put down the tankard, spluttered most abominably, splashing most people in his neighbourhood, and abruptly left the tent. When I rejoined him after luncheon in our old corner he was still coughing at intervals, and giving vent to sundry fits of chuckling.

Things really went a little better for us for the first few overs after lunch, a sturdy young butcher managing to knock up thirteen runs before succumbing to the last ball of the first over sent down by a new bowler who had displaced the fast slinger. But as young Loder had only added one to his score and there had been no extras since lunch, the telegraph stood at 90, 7, 13, and when the next batsman gave an easy catch to mid-on from the last ball of the same over, matters again looked serious. Young Loder, I could not help remarking, was no believer in the old theory of running for a catch,

as he never stirred from his crease, so that in any case the young villager who had galloped down the pitch must have been run out if the catch had not been held.

As the tenth man walked up to the wicket, I could see that my young Oxford friend was looking all about the ground, first at the telegraph board, then at the luncheon tent, and finally in our direction.

And much to my surprise George Peters hurriedly shut up his glasses and returned them to their case, a proceeding that elicited an inquiry from myself as to whether he thought that it was all over.

"Just agoing to begin, Reverend," was the answer, "and I ain't going to run no risks with my glasses. Look out for yourself, Reverend. God bless the Prince of Wales!" and almost before he had completed the pious ejaculation he rolled head over heels backwards, chair and all, with a dexterity that, I verily believe, saved his life. For the first ball of Horrocks's over, struck with the full face of young Loder's bat, fairly hummed and sung as it passed about two feet from my left ear, just where George's head might have been.

"I'm off," exclaimed the worthy old fellow as he picked himself and his chair up; "spanking's begun, and I don't want none myself. I saw young artful focus us, and I guessed what was coming. I ain't going to sit down and be shot at like a young rook. I've seen him play that game afore—a gallus fine marksman too he is," and the next ball came sufficiently near us, as we began to move off, to justify the statement. Having routed our little party, Mr Loder now made matters extremely lively for the good folk in the refreshment tent, fortunately hitting the centre pole at the first shot, but bringing old Joe Higgins, the parish churchwarden, out at the second, rubbing his shin vigorously, but roaring with laughter all the time.

"You mind who you're a-firing at, you audacious young varmint," he bellowed at the top of his voice to the batsman, who had never moved after making his stroke, but stood

perfectly still and watched the progress of the ball. "Do it again for all I care. Bravo!" And then came a hoarse burst of laughter succeeding the hearty outburst of cheering which had greeted Mr Loder's hitting from every side of the ground, for that young gentleman had quietly placed the last ball of the over well out of any fieldsman's reach, and trotted leisurely over to the other end, where he practically repeated the programme. Such is the vanity of mankind that it was not till the end of his second over that the man Horrocks really grasped the idea that Mr Loder had been playing a game of cat-and-mouse with him all the morning, and that he and not Mr Loder was the mouse. Now I am not going to say that this young man hit four balls of every over to the boundary, as the score sheet shows that he did nothing of the sort, but this much will I, John Martin, Clerk in Holy Orders, swear to before a Court of Justice—that in six overs he added no less than seventy-eight runs to his and our score, and that the other batsman had nothing to do except cross to the opposite end, at the conclusion of the first five of those overs. Now and again Mr Loder would receive a ball which for some reason or other did not commend itself to his fancy, and then he would quietly put it back to the bowler and take his amusement out of the succeeding ball; but in no case did he fail to strike a ball that he did take, either to or well over the boundary, except it was the last of an over, when he would place it apparently wherever he had made up his mind to place it for a long single. Nor was it till a perfect tornado of applause had signalised the fact that he had reached his hundred, that we all were suddenly aroused to the fact that in completing that number he had departed from his custom, and, opening his shoulders for a truly leviathan drive, had lost the ball in the double sense of the word. I have in my time watched cricket, good, bad, and indifferent, in many parts of the kingdom, and have seen batsmen of all degrees play different classes of innings, but as a specimen of complete and entire

mastery over the bowling offered to him, of clean and well-timed hitting without fear and without reproach, nothing has in my mind ever been so well worth watching as the performance of this young man Loder here upon our village green. We won our match of course, this same Loder proving himself a very catamount in the field, and on occasion bowling a stray over which generally resulted in the capture of a wicket, and when the wicket had fallen modestly retiring at the end of the over to his place, or what he chose to call his place, in the field, and there being rather ubiquitous than stationary.

But perhaps what pleased me most was that this lad, who did approve himself at all points of the game as a most excellent performer, did by his kind and courteous bearing so recommend himself to friend and foe alike, that it was John Horrocks who proposed three cheers for the young Oxonian at the conclusion of the game, and old Joe Higgins who insisted on presenting him with a bat bearing on a silver plate a suitable inscription. One explanatory remark offered by George Peters to John Horrocks will bear quotation :—

"You see, John, that there M'Gregor he wears a blue coat because he rowed in the Eight, but that there blessed little Loder he've gotten one too, though he ain't a-wearing it to-day, all along of his having played in the Eleven."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE VALLEY D'ARC.

Two years to look forward, two years of banishment, two years of the society of strangers, had seemed almost like an eternity to that thoroughly home-bred young person, Miss Marian Balfour, as she had sat singing sadly to herself in the little drawing-room of her father's home in Bayswater. But time had in this case once more proved that as of joyful days so of sorrowful, the delight or the horror of anticipation will often surpass the delight or the horror of realisation.

Time had sped on at his usual pace, that pace which seems so rapid to decaying, so dawdling to growing humanity; week had succeeded week, month had followed month, with silent celerity, and it now seemed almost difficult for the girl to realise that something rather less than a third and rather more than a quarter of a year was separating her from final emancipation. Not that the days of captivity had been in any sense days of mourning, for the twenty months had passed—so even she, looking forward with pleasure to the thought of returning to England, was fain to confess—like a delicious dream. How much she had really enjoyed it all, enjoyed it if not from the very first day,—for then she had been most abominably sea-sick as well as home-sick,—from the very first week assuredly, after she had exchanged the dinginess and monotony of Bayswater for the peaceful

but joyous restfulness of the Château Marguerite! How warmly she had been received into that dove's nest! How touching had been the fond motherly care of Gertie Ferrier's one-time governess, the elder Mdlle. Carron! How sweet the sympathetic companionship of the young half-sister, Mdlle. Pauline, dearer even as a playmate and confidante than any one of May's fellow-pensionnaires, bright and charming girls as these too were each in their own way! How fascinating were the courteous manners, and the quaint old-fashioned yet ever kindly politeness of the master of the house, the gallant old soldier who, with his hand on his heart, had imparted to Laurence Ferrier his conviction that, of the "sveet" and the "lofely" demoiselles who had ever sheltered beneath his daughter's wing in the Château Marguerite, the "sveetest" and the "lofeliest" and the dearest by far was one Miss Marian Balfour.

"She what you call light up the Château, she scatter—not lily, not carnation—oh, I have your English flower, she scatter roses in her path."

What a halcyon month, too, the August, a year gone now, when the Ferriers had taken a house in the neighbourhood, bringing May's father a willing visitor in their train, and the girl had spent so much of her time with them that M. Carron and pretty Pauline were quite jealous, and declared that "Monsieur le père" and "ces bons Ferriers" had no right to monopolise the society of their Mayflower and to steal the sunshine from the Château! In what good spirits her father had been, in what good health, in what brilliant colours had he painted the beauties of his new parsonage, and the peaceful quiet of a model country village where the few Dissenters that there were lived in charity with their neighbours of the Church, and black sheep with their bleatings and their bickerings were unknown!

"It is too much like the lap of luxury, as I was afraid it would be, my darling," he had said, affecting to grumble.

"Then it is quite the place for you to live in at last, dear;"

and it seemed as she looked into the well-loved face that in these later days the old deep lines were being gradually ironed out.

"And my patron is all that I had heard he was. And then there is Lady Betty—but you must ask Ferrier about her."

And Laurence, when the question what sort of a girl Lady Betty was had been put to him, had confessed that in May's absence, missing, as he said, the pleasure of scolding and criticising some one, in addition to his wife of course, younger and more foolish than himself, he had more or less installed Lord Leuchars' daughter in May Balfour's place as the young creature to be criticised and scolded when occasion—rather rare occasion, to be sure—so offered.

"Yes, May, you will like her, perhaps grow to be very fond of her. Not a bit like yourself, as I call you on the whole a tolerably docile person: she is strong-minded, and yet I will not say too much so—a girl who has her dislikes as well as her likes, and is equally unwilling to be persuaded out of either."

This August the renewed visit of the English party, which had been contemplated, had fallen through owing to a chapter of accidents. It had been difficult to make arrangements in the first place; when made they had been unavoidably broken. The Bishop had chosen to fix a day in the latter end of the first week of August for the consecration of a new burial-ground at Barnwick, causing the postponement of Mr Balfour's holiday to the second week. Then Mrs Ferrier had been attacked by an obstinate summer cold, and again there had been a postponement, and as Mr Balfour had in any case intended to be back in his parish before the harvest thanksgiving, which promised to be settled for an earlier date than usual, the trip across the Channel had finally been altogether abandoned, and the Rector took no holiday at all.

To be sure it was disappointing to all parties, but by way of mitigating the disappointment in his daughter's case, Mr Balfour had fixed that she should return to England and

settle down in the new home a good fortnight earlier than she had expected. And to-day had come a letter from Laurence Ferrier in which he announced his intention of taxing the hospitality of his good friends in the Château Marguerite for two or three days at the end of November, and then of escorting May back to England. And there was one particular paragraph in his letter which caused Miss Balfour to smile, and even to blush a little, as she sat reading it on her camp-stool under a shady tree in the prettily wooded Valley d'Arc.

"I write this from the Mote, where I am staying for two nights. Betty—we arrived at that stage of familiarity a year ago—has forcibly annexed the coloured photograph you sent me, and refuses to part with it. She says—no, I won't tell you what she says, you are probably vain enough already."

What Lady Betty had in very truth said when Ferrier showed her the deftly coloured photograph, which offered, as things go, a very faithful presentment of Miss May Balfour, was after this manner:—

"It is the face of an angel, Mr Ferrier. You may tell me that it is Miss Balfour till you are black in the face, but I tell you it is the face of an angel, and what is more, I am going to take it and hang it up in my room so that I can see it when I am in bed. It will make me feel good to look at it."

"There are Saxon angels and Norman angels, black fiends and white, my dear lady," said Ferrier, intensely pleased by the compliment paid to his favourite. "Now this happens to be a distinctly Saxon face, but——"

"Then I like Saxon," exclaimed Betty. "Oh, those blue eyes and that lovely floss-silk hair!"

"How you do interrupt a man. What I was going to say was that I met a young man the other day, and a very nice young man too, Betty; I took to him very much. I got his brother Dick, with whom I have some—eh—acquaintanceship, to bring him to dine with me. And—ah—were you going to speak?"

"Go on," said a rather muffled voice, the owner of which was blushing violently.

"Well, what I was going to say was that this young man, from expressions he let drop, did seem to me to vastly prefer the Norman angel. Let me see—Lisle has a touch of Norman-French in it, I think. Well, as I was going to say, this young man, for whom I will confess I took a very strong fancy, this Mr Lo——"

"If any other man but my father or yourself ventured to talk to me like that, Mr Ferrier, I would box his ears soundly," exclaimed Betty. "I shall carry away your photograph all the same as a punishment, and keep it too, so there;" and for a moment she turned as if to leave the room, and then changing her mind abruptly, again came and stood by the chair where the lawyer was writing.

"I am glad you have seen him at last," she whispered, "and oh! so glad you liked him."

"Hullo! back again!" and then, dropping his bantering tone, Laurence went on quite seriously, "Indeed, I liked him very much indeed—sound, sensible, and a very thorough gentleman, the sort of young man I would go a very long way to help if occasion offered, and will, please Heaven, so help some day that he shall have what I believe to be his very heart's desire."

For a minute or more there was a dead silence in the room.

"Well, am I to have my ears boxed after all, Betty?" and indeed Laurence gave the girl a fair chance of carrying out her threat. But the punishment inflicted took so sweet and withal so unexpected a form that the recipient, fairly taken by surprise, was more strongly affected than he cared to show, and for a full quarter of an hour after Lady Betty with rosy-red cheeks had made her escape, Laurence, who had thrust aside the letter he was writing and risen from his seat, walked up and down the room, talking rapidly to himself.

"How these young things do twine themselves round our hearts!" he exclaimed at last. "Pshaw, what a fool you

are, my good friend Laurence Ferrier! What business is it of yours after all?" And with this concluding remark he returned to his letter.

But all this is by way of a digression, induced by the fact that Miss Balfour, as she sat on this August day in the Valley d'Arc, happened to be reading a letter from Laurence Ferrier. The young lady was not by way of being in this rather romantic neighbourhood quite alone. She had two companions with her, or, to be more correct, two companions who were supposed to be with her and were at the moment only two or three hundred yards distant—Mdlle. Pauline Carron and a Miss Emily Bernard, the rather dull but wholly amiable daughter of a wealthy ironmaster. Each of these two young ladies was also seated on her camp-stool under her own particular tree, and each was more or less busily engaged in sketching, putting in for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour at a time a spell of really diligent work, and then stopping for a few more minutes to study the effect of what she had done, or to wonder if either of her companions was making better progress than herself. That the other members of the party had got a full hour's start of her was a matter of small consequence to May Balfour, who was also armed with her sketching-book. For was not her power of rapid and efficient work the envy and admiration of all the young ladies who dwelt in the Château Marguerite?

"You are the most provoking creature I ever met, May," Miss Bernard had said this very afternoon on their way out; "you sit with your hands on your lap, or pick flowers, or talk to stray children, or do anything else except work for more than half the time, and then at the end you bring out something that no one but yourself would ever have thought of. I believe you could make a pretty picture of a fir-cone, or a donkey, or an old boot, if you tried." They were strange things, those three, to mention in the same breath, but they happened to be the first three objects that caught Miss Bernard's eye, and for a person absolutely devoid of imagination, it is so much

safer to rely upon the evidence of existent senses than to draw cheques for metaphors upon an empty bank.

Now at last, however, May really thought it was high time to set to work, and here was a rather happy subject ready to hand, almost as if it had placed itself there on purpose to await the pleasure of the fair artist,—a rustic swing hanging from a tree with a roughish-looking urchin standing erect in it, holding on to the ropes and leisurely swinging himself backwards and forwards, while he wondered why the young English lady should suddenly smile and blush as she read her letter. The child was wearing a red fishing-cap set jauntily on the back of his head, there was a certain picturesque raggedness about his nether garments, and a dark blue guernsey, which completed his attire, formed a rather striking contrast to the colouring of the cap. To rise from her seat, approach the child, and promise him half a franc if he would only go on swinging just as he was doing till she told him to stop, was for May the work of a minute.

Then resuming her seat and taking her crayons from their case, she began to work rapidly, in happy unconsciousness that every time she looked up at her subject she was giving a welcome opportunity for a third person to study more attentively what he vowed to himself was the prettiest face he had ever seen in his life. It was only by the merest stroke of good fortune that Mr Richard Loder was now being permitted —*mutatis mutandis*—thus to play the part of Actæon. It had long been an understood thing that he and Alan Chetwynde, and one Ellis, a scholar of Corpus, should go somewhere together for a month in the Long Vacation to do a little quiet reading; and having made no definite plan as to the locality of that somewhere, they had settled the question by the very simple process of drawing lots, and the lot had fallen on Boulogne-sur-Mer.

"What the dickens made you chuck in a silly place like that, Chettie?" inquired Dick, who did not much fancy the idea.

"It is as good as any other place, isn't it?" was the answer. "Besides, I am a good sailor, and I expect you two fellows are not. I hope you'll both be jolly well sea-sick,"—and his hopes were abundantly fulfilled.

Dick had grumbled not a little at the time; but now with this enchanting vision before his eyes he felt that he would not have changed Boulogne-sur-Mer—or at any rate his comfortable perch in the lower boughs of a tree in the Valley d'Arc—for Paradise itself. In all justice to the young man, it should be stated that he was not wholly, or even partly, on idle thoughts bent when he had wended his way to the valley and there settled himself upon a convenient tree. For he was perhaps the most conscientious member of his party in the matter of reading, though his method of getting through work was peculiar to himself, and might not recommend itself to an ordinary intelligence. It was his habit to combine work with a little bodily exercise, strolling out some few miles into the country with a book and a pencil in his pocket, and there choosing some sheltered and convenient spot where he could sit himself down for a good healthy spell of reading, smoking or not as he might feel inclined, and noting such points in his author as might later require a more careful consideration. Notes, though his Oxford text of 'Thucydides' was interleaved, Dick Loder never made, having had allotted to him by Providence that sort of natural memory that requires but little adventitious aid. But he used a pencil with one end red and the other blue, and with this made occasional crosses, a red cross signifying historical, a blue cross constructional points, to be verified or reconsidered. And he even had a scheme of the work of the month mapped out in his head, and now there were only four days of the month to expire. Having got through the ethics for the first time, with this, his last book of 'Thucydides,' Dick would have completed his labours and left a margin for two or three days' complete holiday. Not again of malice prepense had his perch that afternoon been so situated that, by a little craning of the neck round the trunk

of the tree, it commanded a very comfortable three-quarter view of Miss May Balfour. For Actæon was the prior occupant of the premises, and it really was not his fault if Diana elected so to pitch her camp-stool as to give him the opportunity of observing her; and as neither the reading of her letter nor the study of her model necessitated her raising her eyes aloft, it did not follow that the young lady was blind or even near-sighted if she failed to notice the silent watcher. Poor old Thucydides! the dead author had no manner of chance when pitted against the living artist.

"I never saw anything so lovely in my life," the young man muttered more than once to himself, being evidently, like Lady Betty Lisle, an admirer of a Saxon type of beauty, and having the advantage over the young lady of now beholding the original whereof she had admired the counterfeit.

Presently it occurred to him, having on his own part some talent with the pencil, to imitate the girl's proceedings; and exchanging the red and blue contrivance for an ordinary pencil, he set to work to reproduce the fair artist's features on the fly-leaf of his 'Thucydides.' But a small Oxford text neither gives much scope for portrait-painting nor even forms a very convenient block, so that the result of a steady half-hour's work was a caricature of so gruesome a type that the draughtsman hardly knew whether to laugh or tear it up in despair.

At this stage of the proceedings, and just as Mr Loder was commencing his second attempt, an intruder appeared on the scene, another ragamuffin, perhaps a year older than Miss Balfour's model, who manifested an evident intention of disputing with ragamuffin number one the possession of the swing.

A few compliments were exchanged by two shrill voices, a few threats floated in the air; the model, anticipating attack, and naturally feeling that it had better come when he was on *terra firma* rather than in mid-air, jumped to the ground. Dick, who from his vantage-post could see that the interlude, at first amusing to the young lady, was now interrupting her work, and that she was preparing to offer intervention in the

form of bribery, had it in his mind to descend from his perch and go to her assistance, but on second thoughts decided to remain where he was.

"She might be riled at my having sat so tight or she might be frightened," he argued to himself, and with that affected to be immersed in the study of 'Thucydides,' hoping that he might still escape the girl's observation, or that, if she did see him, she might suppose that he had never noticed her presence. Suddenly an accident occurred. The elder boy had jumped into the swing, and the corner of the swing, suddenly set in motion, struck the original occupant on the side of the head with a sickening thud and hurled him to the ground, where he lay bleeding and motionless. With a faint shriek Miss Balfour sprang from her camp-stool; with a muttered exclamation Mr Loder jumped from his perch, and this sudden apparition so startled the author of the disaster that, uttering a lamentable cry, he tumbled off the swing and ran for dear life. To May, in her anxiety for the child, it never occurred either to be startled at the young man's rapid appearance or even to be surprised that he had apparently fallen from the clouds, a heaven-sent messenger. All she cared about at the moment was that here was a young man ready at hand to help her—a young man not only with a full complement of limbs, but, what was more to the purpose, a young man with his wits about him, full of resources, overflowing with kindly sympathy and execrable French.

"Oh, do talk English, please," she said, looking up to him from where she had thrown herself on her knees by the child. There was no time for ceremony: the emergency of the case proved a sufficient introduction. "And get some water somewhere."

In a minute—how or where he had got it was a matter of small consequence—the water was there. She sprinkled some on the boy's face, and now Dick made a happy suggestion.

"I had better put him flat on his back under the shade of the trees; no, don't you bother, I can carry him—you would

spoil your frock," and carefully and tenderly lifting the child in his arms, Dick laid him in the shade.

"Now, the water; steady, old chap," as the boy slowly opened his eyes. "You talk to him, please; tell him to be quiet, and then we will see what is to be done next; and put this under his head where it is bleeding."

So speaking, Dick pulled out his handkerchief and handed it to the girl, without perceiving that he had pulled his book out of his pocket at the same time. The 'Thucydides' fell on the ground unnoticed, and there remained lying.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed May, shivering as she spoke, "his ear is most dreadfully cut."

"Let me look; it's horrid for you. You are not going to faint or anything after being so plucky, are you? Oh no, that's right," as May smiled and shook her head. "By Jove! it's a nasty cut too. Have you got a handkerchief or anything? Oh, thanks!"

Moistening it in the water, Dick made a wad of the little useless article that May handed him, and then, after a moment's hesitation, tore off the tie—a white washing-tie, fortunately—from his own neck, and with deft fingers passed it round the boy's head, completely covering his eyes, and so formed a bandage.

"The less he sees the better," he whispered to May; "he hasn't yelled yet, but he probably will, especially if he sees the blood. Now, what's to be done next? Oh, I know," and he looked at his watch. "There should be a trap of a sort within a quarter of a mile from here in about ten minutes—perhaps it is there now. I'll take the kid back to Boulogne in it, and get him properly strapped by a young English doctor I know there—a capital fellow, and awfully clever too. Perhaps it will want a stitch; anyhow, he will know."

"Oh, how sweet of you!"

Out it came on the spur of the moment, and as the words left her lips May felt so annoyed with herself for having used one word that she could almost have bitten her tongue off.

And then she did quite the weakest thing in the world to do under the circumstances, she tried to modify and explain.

"I mean, how very kind of you to take all that trouble for the poor little boy."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all—good-bye," and Dick politely raised his hat before stooping to pick up his burden.

But as May offered her ungloved hand it was not to be expected that the young man should refuse to avail himself of the opportunity, and the slight pressure of the soft fingers fairly set every fibre in his body quivering.

Before her late companion, carrying the child, had got well out of sight, May, hearing her name called, turned round sharply, and as she turned her eye fell upon the neglected 'Thucydides,' and in a second, without knowing exactly why she so did, she had thrust it into the bosom of her dress, and was standing prepared to answer the voluble inquiries of Miss Bernard, who, being much too conscientious a student to look up from her work more than once in a quarter of an hour, and having only just awoke to the fact that her darling May was shaking hands with a strange young man, and that the young man was now walking off in the distance carrying a child in his arms, hurried up to the scene of the accident, to be followed a minute later by Mdlle. Pauline.

Of a perfect avalanche of questions, emanating principally from her English friend, which now assailed May Balfour, that young lady answered quite as many as she was either able or inclined to furnish suitable replies to.

Yes, there had been an accident; a child, a boy whom she was painting, had been hurt by a swing—not by May herself, of course, but by another boy who had come up and been very disagreeable. She did not know either of the boys' names because she had never asked for them. If Emily was so very anxious to know the bigger boy's name and to have him well whipped, she was quite welcome to run after him, and even to do the whipping herself, provided of course that she could catch him. He could not be much more than half a mile away,

but whether he had fled east or west or south or north May had not troubled her head to notice. Of course she had flown to the injured child's assistance, and then a young man had come to her assistance—a very nice young man, or at least a very kind young man: he had been very kind and gentle to the child, and had not been stupid or made impossible suggestions, but had bandaged the child's head up, and was now taking him to Boulogne to have it properly attended to.

So far, so good: Mdlle. Pauline, who was more or less in charge of her two young companions, and responsible for their decorous behaviour, was perfectly satisfied.

Still there were several other things which Emily Bernard would have liked to know, but in the matter of some of them she had to rest content without knowing quite all that she desired.

"Was he English?"

"Very much so," and here May fairly laughed aloud as she recalled Mr Loder's valorous attempts to talk in an unknown tongue.

"Was he good-looking?"

"Well, really, dear, I never noticed much. But I thought he had nice eyes."

And May had no idea of course what his name was?

"Not the slightest—Brown, Jones, or Robinson very likely. Weren't those the three gentlemen who went abroad once?" And yet, as she said this in the most careless tone possible, May felt in her own mind a conviction, it may even be called a pleasant conviction, that before the world was many years older that mystery at all events would be no longer a mystery to her. There was nothing much in a name after all, but still she felt sufficiently interested in this young man of the kindly heart and the ready hand to want to know his name, just in case—well, in case she should ever meet him again.

"And where did he come from?"

"Where did he come from?" May repeated the question to herself. "Well, indeed, my dear inquisitive Emily, I hardly know where he did come from. I just looked up and there he

was. But now you ask me, I seem to have a vague idea that he tumbled down from aloft somewhere; it must have been from a tree, I suppose—it could hardly have been from the clouds, you know, and I am quite sure it was not from the swing. It was just like Aladdin and the wonderful lamp. You remember, don't you?—the genius rubbed a lamp, and lo! there was Aladdin: no, though, I think it was the other way up; it was Aladdin who rubbed the lamp, and the genius came and did all sorts of wonderful things. Perhaps my young man was Aladdin."

And as Aladdin Mr Loder was spoken of whenever any allusion was made to May's adventure by the young ladies in the Château Marguerite. Some more certain information which May herself had gathered as to the young man's identity never went further than herself. She had found out from the front page of the 'Thucydides,' which of its own merits she stigmatised as a silly little book, that the owner's name was R. Loder, and then she had felt rather aggrieved that the information was not a trifle more precise. In her own books she was accustomed to write Marian Balfour, or May Balfour, or occasionally May without the Balfour, but this very perverse young man had left a very wide margin for guessing, so far as his Christian name—by far the more interesting of the two—was concerned, and May presently found herself trying what name beginning with R seemed to go best with Loder.

"Rowland or Roland? too namby-pamby; Ralph? no, it shan't be Ralph," for here she recollected a very unpleasant young cub, who had rejoiced in the name of Ralph, in her nursery days. "Robert? Richard? Now let me see what Roberts and Richards I know? There was Robert of Normandy, and Robert the Devil; oh no, that won't do at all. Richard Cœur de Lion? Richard sans peur? He looked very brave, and he was very kind and very strong," and fortunately, omitting to think of Richard Crookback, May Balfour then and there did give to Richard Loder his own proper name, and did retain in her heart a kindly feeling for the young man who had

so promptly and so cheerfully and so kindly come to the assistance of her little model and herself.

Actuated by some curious impulse, the young lady next proceeded to take a pencil in her hand, and in very faint characters added the missing letters of the supposed name, and for the first time, turning over the page, discovered Mr Loder's attempted portraiture of herself. True, the features might have been those of Medusa or any other Gorgon, but there was a certain suspicious circumstance about the figure which at once caught May's eye, and that was a lady's hat—by no means a badly drawn hat either—hanging to the side of the seat, exactly as May had hung her own hat as she worked away at her model. And there in the privacy of her own room May first shrieked with laughing over the young man's efforts, then looked in the glass, and nodding to the fair face she saw there, remarked to herself, with a touch of satisfaction, "Well, you are not quite as bad as that at all events," then blushed as she reflected how long that very kind yet very audacious young man must have been watching her, and finally locked up the book in a despatch-box which no prying eye was likely to invade.

Mr Loder had in the mean time been doing for his little patient all that could be expected of him under the circumstances, more, perhaps, than every young fellow of his age would have done, enough in any case to commend the warm approbation of the young English doctor, whose acquaintance Dick had luckily made a week or two back at a small semi-English club. He had carried the child to the edge of the wood, and there waylaid his companion's fiacre in which he had conveyed his patient back to Boulogne and straight to the doctor's house. The doctor, who was by the merest chance in the world at home, had at once taken the case in hand, and having put a couple of stitches in the damaged ear, had undertaken to visit the child in the course of the next day.

"And now, Loder, are you really going to take him back yourself? Well, it is very kind of you, but I think it will be safer if you really don't mind. Look in and smoke a pipe with

me this evening, and bring along the other fellows, eh? Oh, you will, that's right. Au revoir, my dear fellow."

"Yes, but——" and Dick began fumbling for his purse.

"What! fee! stuff and nonsense, my dear boy. I am not going to take a fee for a thing like that. And from you too! Why, you have done enough for the poor little urchin in all conscience. No, no, my dear fellow, let us show these foreigners that we aren't all a race of greedy shopkeepers. So off you go now, and in you all come to-night. By the way, there are those two handkerchiefs: I'll tell my old lady here to wash them, and you can take them back to-night. No, thanks; off you go."

Having found out from the little fellow that he lived in a cottage about half a mile from the scene of the accident, Dick had taken him there and handed him over to his mother's charge, giving her a brief account of the accident, and warning her on no account to meddle with the stitches until the doctor paid his promised visit. And it was only when he had taken leave of the woman, leaving a napoleon in her hand and smiling kindly as she poured out a volume of thanks, of which he understood about one-quarter, that he joined his companions in a cabaret where they had originally arranged to have tea together.

"And hang it all, I've lost my 'Thucydides,'" he suddenly exclaimed in the middle of his narration of his adventures. "Come and help me to look for it; it must be near the swing."

The search was ineffectual, as may be supposed, and from that day forth Dick never troubled his head about it. He was annoyed for a moment, perhaps, that his valuable coloured crosses had been wasted, and that he must either procure another copy of the second volume of 'Thucydides' or leave those few last chapters to a more convenient season; but he fairly chuckled at the thought of some French peasant picking up the book and trying to make head or tail of its contents.

It was only in his bedroom that night, when he came to

examine the contents of a little parcel which the doctor had thrust into his hand as the party left the house after smoking the promised pipe, that he found it to contain treasure-trove indeed,—not of a sort to command a large price in open market, but worth, in this young man's eyes, a good deal more than the proverbial weight of gold. Having no sisters of his own, and so ignorant of the ways of women in these matters, he flew to the corners of his treasure and there found the two letters "M. B." The letters were neatly embroidered, to be sure, but it was vastly unsatisfying all the same, and yet had the man been more advanced in the occult science of the ways of womanhood he might have considered himself liberally treated in not being put off with the single letter "M."

What fools some men are, how unsympathetic are others! In the middle of breakfast on the following morning, suddenly and wholly *apropos* of nothing, Dick blurted out the question which had been puzzling his brain most of the night—

"I wonder what M. B. stands for?"

Prompt and ready came the answer from Chetwynde, with his mouth half full of biftek, "Martha Buggins for choice"; and then the speaker felt quite aggrieved when Dick hurled half a yard of bread at his head.

Later in the day, and indeed for the greater part of the two next days, the last before his return to England, a disconsolate Orlando might have been roaming to and fro in the Valley d'Arc, searching in vain for Rosalind. If he went not to the length of spoiling innocent timber by cutting either Rosalind or M. B. on the bark of trees, he showed many other signs of an Orlando-like distress. And a certain young lady at the Château Marguerite, confined to her room for three days by a most unromantic and stuffy cold, and by no means looking at her best, spent a full hour of her captivity in turning over every page of the second volume of 'Thucydides' in the vain hope that she might be able more satisfactorily to establish the identity of the late proprietor.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE WOODS.

Not in the Valley d'Arc, but in an almost equally pretty scene in the woodlands of Westhamptonshire, along a path some three miles from the Mote, and a mile or less from Barksworth village, was slowly walking on a December afternoon Miss May Balfour, carrying a little empty basket in her hand. She had almost come to a certain stile which on her outward journey she had found to be as nearly as possible halfway between the Rectory, whither she was now returning, and Harry Stokes's pretty cottage, that stands midway between Tasker Wood and Fir Lawn, the second most important covert on the Mote estate. A great man was Harry Stokes now, from a sporting point of view ranking on the Mote estate second only to the great John Fox himself. Promotion in his case had gone by merit. Originally appointed by Mr Fox to the post of vermin-trapper and rabbit-ferreter, he had shown such marked ability and diligence that when the second keeper had found a head-keepership at a distance on his own account, John Fox had immediately recommended Harry for the vacant place.

"He've a good eye and a good nose, my lord," John had said to Lord Leuchars. "He can wind if one of they messy foxes have been prowling round my pheasant coops, he can tell a man's face half-a-mile off, and he can run him down

if he's a mind to, and break his head when he gets there and all." And Lord Leuchars had no hesitation about appointing a man with such very essential points in his favour to the vacant billet.

If Miss Balfour had been on a charitable mission, carrying as she had in her basket certain little comforts to the under-keeper's wife, who had been laid by with a touch of influenza, she had reaped a satisfactory reward. It had come upon the girl in the form of a very agreeable surprise, to discover, on her return to England, that a Mr Loder of Loders was resident in her immediate neighbourhood, an outlying parishioner of her father's parish. That the old gentleman himself was not altogether a satisfactory individual, and that he had only set foot inside the church-doors once during her father's incumbency, were matters that did not interest the young lady half so much as the knowledge that one of his sons, Richard by name, was an undergraduate at Oxford, and was, according to Lady Betty Lisle, a very charming and a very clever boy.

"He will be back here soon, dear," explained Lady Betty, rather amused by May's curiosity on the subject of Dick Loder's personal appearance, "and then, as he does go to church, which his old heathen of a father does not do, you can see for yourself. Oh yes, Dick is a perfect dear, and I love him; not that way, you sweet little goose," for May had opened her eyes rather wide, "so you need not look so startled. Not that I don't like to see you look at me like that, with those big blue eyes. Oh dear! must you really go, child? —come again soon. You know how I love to have you to talk to."

For it had pleased Lady Betty to take her angel of light straight to her heart to love and to cherish, and that, not merely because the child was both sweetly pretty and entirely lovable on her own account, but because May had been especially recommended to her care by Laurence Ferrier.

"Oh, I know that my nose is sadly out of joint now that

your May is coming home, sir," she had said to the lawyer, "but if I can only be one-half as kind to your May as you have been to me,"—and here, though not given to being emotional, she hesitated for a moment, as unable to trust her voice, and finally concluded, "well, if I am not, I am a brute, and my name is not Betty Lisle."

And to-day May seemed to have arrived a considerable deal nearer to the establishment of the identity between Dick, whom Betty pronounced to be so charming, and the Richard Loder—she was quite sure now that his name was Richard—who came to her assistance some fifteen weeks ago in the Valley d'Arc.

The covert-shooting at the Mote had just come to a successful conclusion, and Stokes as well as the head-gamekeeper had been congratulated on the amount of game that had been shown, as well as upon the handling of the beaters.

"And Stokes do say, Miss, as none of them could touch Master Dick as shot better nor any one, better nor that Mr Chevely as has got red hair and as none of them can't abide because as he's that spiteful and uppersome."

"And do they like Master Dick? Who is Mr Dick?" and May waited for the answer to the duplex question with a degree of nervous anxiety which she did not seem to herself able to account for.

"Master Dick Loder, in course!" exclaimed the woman, taking the second question first, "who else should it be? And like him! There isn't a man, or a woman, or a child in the village, and come to that not a dog either, as don't love Mr Dick. You'd say the same yourself, Miss, if you was to come to know him," and then interpreting the colour that suddenly mounted to May's face as a sign that she had accidentally wounded the young lady's sense of propriety, Mrs Stokes resorted to generalities.

"My man says he'd drag himself on his bended knees to serve Master Dick if it was ever so. And no wonder! It was he that set us on our legs when times was bad, and not never

a word of thanks wouldn't he take either. 'Right you are, Anne,' says he in his own cheery way. I was servant once up at Loders, Miss—so as he always calls me Anne. 'And now you're here,' says he, 'just you sit tight, old girl,' he says, 'and see that Harry keeps steady, and sits tight too.' That was Master Dick all over! And there's never a time as he comes home that he don't come and see me. There, that is what he brought me and Harry when he come home from furrin' parts. They makes those things that way out there, don't they, Miss?" and Mrs Stokes fetched out of a cupboard a little work-box with a picture on the outside, and a gaily decorated sort of hookah pipe, which articles she placed on the table for her visitor's inspection. And May, studying with some attention the picture on the work-box, readily recognised a pretty bit of country scenery near Boulogne, and drew her own conclusions.

It was half-past three or thereabouts when she left Mrs Stokes's cottage, and, walking with rapid steps, in less than a quarter of an hour she found herself within sight of the stile, and then for a minute stopped to meditate. Why had her heart fluttered so as she listened to Mrs Stokes's rather rambling statements? Why did she feel so inordinately pleased that she had fairly run to ground the owner of the silly little book which was still locked up in her despatch-box, so glad and so proud that all sorts and conditions of people, Lady Betty and this poor woman, should sound Mr Richard Loder's praises? What was the young man to her or she to him? They had only met once by the veriest accident, and had not even known each other's names, and yet—May paused in her reflections.

"I don't care. I did like him, and I am very glad that I shall very likely see him again."

She repeated it to herself twice over rather after the manner of a child that has made up its mind to have its own way, and then looked at her watch. It was a quarter to four, and the setting sun was blazing full in her face as she resumed her walk,

and turned the corner of the path a dozen or more yards from the stile, on either side of which is a little foot-bridge thrown over the rather broad ditch. A shadow seemed to fall across her path, and May instinctively raised her hand to shade her eyes, and saw that a rather large man was seated on the stile and showed no present intention of moving. Stopping for a moment, the girl coughed slightly by way of attracting the man's attention, and then was rather startled to notice that instead of moving he only sat still and responded to her cough with a nod and a smile.

Not a little alarmed, but thinking it wiser to put a bold face on the matter, May advanced to her end of the tiny bridge. Still the man—a young man, as she could now see, with red hair and a not very benignant cast of countenance, smile and all taken into consideration—remained sitting.

"Will you allow me to go by, please?" said May, speaking as firmly as she could.

"And where are you going to, my pretty maid?" and again the same insolent smile played on Algernon Chevely's lips as he sat there, taking stock of the girl's appearance.

Now seriously alarmed, vainly looking to the right hand and the left, but seeing no way of escape from her persecutor, May, without taking any notice of his question, in a trembling voice repeated her request.

"Will you allow me to go by, please?"

"Well, perhaps, all things taken into consideration, I will, my pretty maid. You are a very pretty maid, you know," and still keeping his eyes on the girl's face, Chevely leisurely dismounted from the stile on the far side of the little bridge from May, holding out his hand as if with the intention of assisting her. "But you must pay toll, you know, my pretty maid. We allow no one to pass this bridge without paying toll." This he added as May, though shaking in every limb, with the idea that each step towards home was a step nearer safety and protection, ventured to cross the bridge and to lay one hand upon the stile.

As the last insolent remark, accompanied as it was by another meaning smile, reached the girl's ears, she uttered a short sharp cry of despair.

"Oh, will no one—oh!"

For at the moment there was a spring and a thud, and Chevely's figure seemed to vanish from the bridge, and a welcome hand was stretched out to assist her.

Dick Loder had happened to go up to the woods that afternoon with the knowledge that his friend Harry Stokes, who was breaking in a spaniel for him, was likely to be found with the dog picking up the cripples in Fir Lawn. Having found Stokes and spent an hour in his company watching the dog work, Dick had walked with him through the woods, meaning to look in at the cottage and see how Mrs Stokes was getting on with her cold. In the course of their walk they had come across a wounded cock bird, which on the spaniel giving chase had run into the hedge some hundred yards above the pathway, and the covert being thick in places both dog and bird had temporarily disappeared.

"You try the wood, Harry, and I'll walk along the fence and see if I can hear anything of them." And so, having climbed the fence to secure easier walking, Dick had come within a few yards of Chevely without the latter being aware of his presence.

"That's odd," muttered Dick; "I wonder what the fellow wants here," and then, not having the slightest desire to have a chat and perhaps walk homewards with Chevely, he waited, under the impression that the latter would shortly be moving off. Suddenly he became aware that Chevely was talking to some one, and though strongly reluctant to play the part of spy, could not resist the temptation to see who that some one was. And advancing cautiously a few steps, he looked and saw—the fair artist of the Valley d'Arc. Almost instantaneously with the recognition came the full understanding of what those hitherto mysterious initials stood for. M. B. then was May Balfour, the parson's daughter, the girl with whose beauty Betty

Lisle was positively entranced, the girl about whom she had two mornings before said, "She'll make your little heart go pit-a-pat, my dear Dick, the very first time you see her."

Pit-a-pat indeed! He felt as he stood there and once more got a full view of his woodland divinity that his heart was beating so loud, thumping even, yes, thumping so that if he was not careful she would surely hear it. Next he saw Chevely descend from the stile, and for a second felt that he would give his ears just for that minute to be standing in that beast Chevely's shoes. And then he heard Chevely's voice—he could not catch the words—to be followed by May's despairing cry, "Will no one?" "Will no one?" In far less time than it takes to narrate, Dick bounded forward, and Chevely, half turning at the sound, and receiving the full shoulder shock of a man reputed to be the wiriest and, for a light weight, the hardest three-quarter back in England, was knocked head over heels off the bridge and into the ditch, falling all the more heavily from the fact that he weighed a full three stone more than the man who had thus unceremoniously disposed of him.

Hurriedly availing herself of the hand that was now offered her, May surmounted the stile, and half walking, half running, sped on her homeward journey, biting her lips hard the while, poor child, to prevent herself from crying.

"Quick, quick," she gasped breathless with terror of pursuit, breathless with joy of relief; and Dick, not condescending to trouble himself further about the beast Chevely, accepted the words as an invitation to accompany her. In any case, whether she had said another word or no, he had not the slightest intention to lose sight of her till he had seen her safe inside her father's gates.

After the first quarter of a mile, as the girl gradually recovered her composure and the fear of pursuit was banished from her mind, May slackened her pace, and it then occurred to Dick that, all things considered, it is a less unusual spectacle

for a young man to be seen walking alongside a girl than to be treading in her footsteps. Hitherto he had never opened his lips, nor did he now offer to speak as they walked on at a more sober pace a full yard apart, though side by side.

And presently May stole a shy look at her deliverer, and so looking finally banished from her mind any lingering doubt as to his identity with the owner of the 'Thucydides.' Another hundred yards, and then a very low sweet voice inquired—

"Is Mr Richard Loder always so ready to hand to help his friends?"

"He hopes that he may always be so when Miss May Balfour wants his help."

"How did you know my name?" she asked timidly.

"How did you know mine?" was the answer.

May looked at him, and then catching his eye, looked elsewhere.

"I saw it in a book of yours—a 'Thucydides,' don't you call it? At least I saw 'R. Loder,' and I think I guessed the rest."

"Well, it is Thucydides as a matter of fact," and Dick laughed quietly as he corrected the false quantity, "and I saw your name on a pocket-handkerchief, at least I saw M. B., and I didn't guess the rest till to-day."

"Then I am a cleverer person than you are," asserted May with an answering laugh. "But what right had you to keep my pocket-handkerchief, sir?"

"The same right as you had to keep my 'Thucydides,'" answered the young man with some audacity. "More right perhaps. It was the only 'Thucydides' I had got as it happened, and I daresay you had got a good many more pocket-handkerchiefs."

"I am sorry," she said penitently, "sorry if I inconvenienced you. But you would have inconvenienced me much more if it had been my only pocket-handkerchief, for as it happened I caught the most dreadful cold, and had to stay in the house I don't know how long."

"That's why I never found you when I went to the place

to look—I mean to try to give you back the pocket-handkerchief."

And after this they talked on as easily as they could about indifferent things till, when they were in sight of the Rectory gates, May suddenly stood still, and offering her hand to Dick, said, "Now, Mr Loder, I am going to say good-bye. I must be very inhospitable, and not ask you to come in. You see, we have never been properly introduced yet," smiling, "and my father might think it odd if I were to bring a strange young man in to tea. And then, besides, I must tell him. Oh, what shall I tell him? I always tell him everything, but I can't tell him all quite. Help me, please."

It was inexpressibly pleasing to Dick to be thus appealed to by the girl in all evident sincerity.

"I think I should simply say that you were frightened in the woods by some rough fellow; it is quite true, isn't it? He will probably think it was a poacher, and all the better. It certainly wouldn't do to frighten the old gentleman."

"How dare you call my father an old gentleman!" exclaimed May, up in arms in a moment. "He isn't old a bit."

"Of course he's not old really," apologised Dick; "I really beg your pardon; I wasn't thinking what I was saying. I know your father a little, that is, I have spoken to him, and I thought he was a very nice old—oh!" for May held up a warning finger, "I mean a very charming person. But I shouldn't frighten him all the same if I were you."

"Perhaps not," said May indifferently. "But now I must say good-bye, Mr Loder. I am glad you know my father, and like him. And now," giving him her hand, "thank you so much for all your kindness to me. I am not the only person you have been kind to either,—no," as he began to protest, "I don't mean even that little boy. But a very grateful woman was telling me a great deal about Mr Dick Loder up in the woods to-day."

"She probably told you a lot of nonsense."

"It wasn't nonsense at all, and what's more, I did believe

and do believe every word of it. Seeing is believing, so there, Mr Loder. Good night, and thank you again," and extricating the little hand which Dick Loder had shown some inclination to retain for an unnecessarily long time in his own, May Balfour hurried into the Rectory, and there at tea she told her father just as much of her adventure as she felt inclined to.

"I think you ought to have asked the young man in to tea, dear," remarked the Rector.

"Oh, he's coming to tea to-morrow," answered the girl, perfectly certain in her own mind that he would so come, even though she had given him no definite invitation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALGERNON CHEVELY.

Mr Algernon Chevely had not been having a very happy or a very successful day at the Mote; indeed it might be said that his visit from start to finish had been a failure.

It had been with considerable reluctance that Lord Leuchars had in the first instance yielded to his wife's solicitations and invited the young gentleman to shoot the Mote coverts that year. Personally he disliked Chevely's presence equally in the house and in the shooting-field, and his lordship was a man whom no one outside the family circle accounted as being given to taking unreasonable prejudices.

"He is neither a gentleman nor a sportsman, my dear," he had said to Lady Leuchars *apropos* of this young man; "he does not know how to behave himself when he is out shooting, and, what is more, he does not know how to talk to a lady. If you don't believe me, ask Betty."

"He always talks to me very pleasantly," pleaded Lady Leuchars. "I don't think that silly little goose Betty is at all nice to him or at all fair."

"Betty is anything but a goose," replied the father, who particularly disliked to hear any reflections cast upon his one and only child. "She is in most ways extremely sensible, and if she does not like a man, or a woman either, she can generally give a pretty good reason for not liking the one or the other."

"Well, you never asked the poor boy to shoot at all last year. And besides, they tell me that poor Lord Selcombe is very shaky."

It was the former argument that carried the day with Lord Leuchars, who failed to see the exact relevancy of the remark about Lord Selcombe's shakiness. His good nature revolted from the idea of his seeming to be intentionally discourteous or unkind to the son of an old friend, and the end of it was that Algernon Chevely was invited to shoot, and accepted the invitation.

On the second day, when they were shooting Tasker Wood, Chevely, who was a notoriously jealous shot, in the last beat before luncheon elected rather rudely to claim two birds which Dick Loder had most certainly killed.

"What the devil is your fellow meddling with my birds for, Loder?" he shouted.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought they were mine,—take them to Mr Chevely," was the answer; and as the man who was collecting the results of Dick's stand rather reluctantly obeyed the order, the incident might have been regarded as closed.

Unfortunately the beaters' luncheon was placed rather nearer the gentlemen's table than usual, round a corner where two broad drives intersect each other. Out of sight on a rather windy day is not always the same as out of earshot, and towards the end of luncheon, when tongues become loosened, the following conversation between two beaters came floating on the breeze:—

"Them two birds as I had in my hand were young Dick's right enough, as I seed 'im shoot 'em. But that there Gingertop, he'd sell his own grandmother for a brace of pheasants. I'd jolly well like to bile 'im."

"And I'd jolly well not like to eat 'im, then; he's too sour for my liking is old Gingertop." Laughter is apt to be contagious: the dialogue was altogether too upsetting for one or two of the younger members of the shooting-party, who at once exploded, and as their seniors followed the bad example,

the hoarse guffaw from the ring of beaters was echoed by a hearty burst of laughter from the shooters' table.

Perhaps Lord Leuchars, who, after a prolonged effort to preserve his dignity, had finally broken down as badly as anybody, did not mend matters, when, wiping his eyes and speaking in as firm a voice as he could command, he sent by his valet the following message to the beaters: "Be good enough to go and tell the gentlemen round the corner that I shall be glad if they will either not talk quite so loud or at any rate not make personal remarks about us."

That Chevely shot vilely for the rest of that day is not entirely to be wondered at.

It was considerably annoying to his lordship when, on coming down to breakfast on the Friday morning after the shooting was all over, he discovered that, whereas his other and more welcome guests were preparing to depart, Mr Chevely, aided and abetted by his hostess, proposed to inflict himself upon the Mote for yet another day.

"Leuchars, Algie says that there is nothing particular to take him home to-day, and so he is going to stop with us till to morrow."

Lady Leuchars had chosen a very opportune moment to make this announcement. It is obviously impossible for a host to tell an unwelcome visitor that he is not wanted in the house before a dozen other people at the breakfast-table, especially when the lady of the house is a consenting party to the prolongation of the visit. So it only remained for Lord Leuchars to accept the inevitable and to express a fear that Mr Chevely would find it rather dull, as all the other men were going and he himself had a most particular business engagement.

"Oh, Betty and I will amuse him," exclaimed Lady Leuchars, and Betty vowed to herself that she would do nothing of the kind, and remembering that they were dining alone that night, then and there made up her mind that she would have a headache not later than 9.30 P.M.

"Algie would so much like a ride this morning, Betty dear," suggested Lady Leuchars about two hours later.

"By all means; it's a lovely morning for a ride," and Betty, having thus given her consent, retired to her bedroom.

"But where is Lady Betty's horse?" inquired Mr Chevely presently, on finding that only one horse had come round to the door.

"Her ladyship sent to say that she was not going to ride this morning, sir," replied the groom, touching his hat, and Mr Chevely had after all to go alone.

As soon as she knew that the coast was clear, down came Betty, only, as evil luck would have it, to encounter her mother in the hall.

"What! haven't you two young people started for your ride yet?" exclaimed her ladyship.

"I fancy Mr Chevely has started. I never said that I was going to ride."

"What a wicked girl you are, Betty!" and Lady Leuchars felt that she would like to shake her daughter.

"Then I am sure that I should be a very bad companion for your dear Mr Chevely, mother dear,"—and curtseying to her mother in acknowledgment of the compliment paid to her, Betty went off for a walk by herself.

After luncheon the positions were so far reversed that Mr Chevely, coming downstairs faultlessly equipped for pedestrian exercise, was informed by the butler, who, being much of his master's way of thinking, could hardly command his countenance as he spoke, that Lady Betty had just started for a ride.

"Curse her impertinence," growled the young man to himself as, after a momentary hesitation, he started on a solitary walk; and he now for the first time began to seriously reflect whether he would not be well advised to abandon the pursuit of a girl who, in the face of all the advances he had made to her, seemed to have so resolutely set her face against having anything whatever to say to him.

"If it wasn't for the old woman I would cut the whole bag of tricks, and be glad to see the girl marry her d—d pauper, and be a d—d pauper herself. She is devilish pretty and all that, but—yes, I will marry her, I'll be hanged if I won't, if it's only just for the pleasure of shaking some of that infernal nonsense out of her afterwards."

This was the train of reasoning which had been occupying Mr Chevely's thoughts as he sat on the stile at the time that the modern and rather enlarged edition of Little Red Riding Hood crossed his path, so that he was not in a wholly amiable frame of mind to start with.

When, two minutes after he had been uncceremoniously upset into the ditch by Mr Loder, he had so far recovered from the sudden shock of the assault as to drag himself painfully out of the ditch, and examine the extent of his injuries, he was fairly beside himself with rage. His hat was smashed, he was wet and muddy from head to foot, his hands were scratched, and his nose was bleeding. His first impulse was to start in pursuit of May and her companion, but fancying that he heard the sound of other footsteps, he abandoned the idea, and stared wildly round him, trying to make out from which direction the sound came, and by the time that he had convinced himself that he was mistaken an effectual pursuit seemed hopeless. So he reseated himself on the stile and began to review the situation.

"I suppose I must hang about till it's dark, and then get into the house somehow. But I'll break every bone in that infernal fellow Loder's body in the mean time,"—and viciously clutching his stick, he made his way through the woods by a short cut which his shooting experiences had taught him, to another stile between Barksworth and the Mote, where two paths separate, the one leading to the Mote and the other to Loders, and there he sat to await Dick's arrival.

It was pretty obvious to Dick Loder as, walking with light step and lighter heart, he saw the mud-stained figure of his late adversary in possession of the stile, that his right of way was to be disputed, and that he was in for a row.

"Well, are you going to move?" he said curtly as he stopped and looked at Chevely.

"Yes, I am," majestically stepping from the stile, "and what's more, I am going to give you the very best thrashing you ever had in your life," and he raised his stick in a threatening manner, only to have it promptly snatched out of his hand and thrown over a hedge before he quite realised what the other was going to do. Dick Loder had had a tolerably good education on the football field in the art of snatching a more difficult thing than a stick from another man's grasp.

"And now for the thrashing," quietly remarked Dick, after executing this masterly manœuvre; and then as he avoided the first mad rush, he awoke to the fact that he was playing fisticuffs with a man not only several stone heavier than himself, but one who had a better knowledge of the game. For though he had neither rowed nor played cricket at Eton, Chevely had taken in his time some valuable lessons in boxing.

One point Dick felt sure was in his favour—he was, after a term's football, in first-rate training, and as hard as nails, while Mr Chevely was decidedly beefy.

Going in accordingly for out-fighting, Dick had managed so far to keep out of harm's way, and even to land one heavy blow upon Chevely's ribs, when a stern voice suddenly exclaimed—

"What is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?" and both men, lowering their hands on the sound, turned round to encounter the indignant and astonished gaze of Lord Leuchars.

"What is the meaning of all this? How dare you two young fellows come and brawl on a public footpath like a couple of bargees? Dick Loder, I am ashamed of you, and you too Mr Chevely. Now, what is it all about?"

For a moment there was no answer to the question, the one man having only a very lame story to tell, the other resolutely determined that, come what might, Miss Balfour's name should not be dragged into the discussion if he could help.

Lord Leuchars looked first at one and then at the other awaiting an explanation.

"Well!" he said sternly.

"Begging your lordship's pardon, but I think I can put in a word to that." The words came from a wholly unexpected quarter, and Lord Leuchars fairly started as out of the deep ditch almost close to his feet crawled forth Harry Stokes, his lordship's own second keeper.

"It was just so, my lord, this is how it were. Yon young man as do deserve to have every bone in his body broke were teasing and annoying of the parson's daughter, as sweet a young lady as ever stepped. He stopped her at the stile nigh agin where my cottage is—your lordship knows the stile as well as I do, just ahint Fir Lawn." Lord Leuchars nodded. "Well, young Miss, she were fair sceart on him, and she just gave a screech like, and in another 'arf-minute I'd have had he by the throat—ay, I would, young man, for all you looks so ugly, same as I'd have a stoat. But Master Dick he was aforehand with me. He just toppled him into the ditch, and then I warrant as——"

"Stop," said Lord Leuchars authoritatively. "And now, Mr Chevely," sternly eyeing the young man.

Chevely, thus forced to speak, took refuge in the very worst line of defence that he could possibly have adopted, muttering disjointed remarks to the effect that he could not possibly have known that the girl was the parson's daughter, and that he had only meant a little harmless fun.

"If those are your views, Mr Chevely," said Lord Leuchars, very gravely, "will you allow me to say that I really do not want to hear any more of them. Do you think, sir, it matters to me whether the young lady in the case was the clergyman's daughter, dear sweet girl as she happens to be, or my own daughter, or that good fellow's daughter? At the risk of appearing very inhospitable, Mr Chevely, I may remark that a train leaves Westhampton at a quarter before six, and it is now," consulting his watch, "ten minutes past four.

I shall be glad if you will make it convenient to go by that train. Please order anything that you like at the stables, and if you find it convenient to leave your servant to pack your clothes, he can go by a later train. You had better leave me to make your excuses to the ladies of my house. And now I wish you good afternoon, Mr Chevely."

When Chevely, looking considerably crestfallen, had got fairly out of hearing on his way to the Mote, Lord Leuchars turned to Stokes—

"You haven't explained yet how you came to be here, Stokes, hiding in that ditch."

"Begging your lordship's pardon, as I were vermin-trapper for a year or more, and one has to go to queer shifts to trap such vermin as yon," and here he pointed over his shoulder at the receding form of Mr Chevely. "I seed as the young man weren't best pleased, as he shook his fist arter Master Dick and all, so I says to myself, I think I'll see as you don't get into no more mischief to-night, young man. And when I saw him a-sitting on the stile, I just makes a bit of a round like and crawls up this here ditch so as I may lie handy."

"Very handy," said Lord Leuchars, smiling. "Now look you here, my man," he continued after a moment's thought. "You have behaved very well indeed, like a good and sensible fellow, and so I am just going to give you this sovereign. But now not a word of this must go any further—don't tell your own wife even. No one must know a single word about it, for the young lady's sake, you know, and for Mr Dick's sake."

When Stokes, after receiving the welcome gratuity and giving the required promise, had been dismissed, Lord Leuchars for the first time addressed himself to Dick.

"Well, young man," he said, putting his hand on Dick's shoulder, "you may consider yourself forgiven,—in fact, there is nothing to forgive. I should have done the same in your case and at your age, especially perhaps with a very pretty girl in the case. She is a very dear little thing, and I have a great respect for her father, and I would not have this happen

for a great deal. If it came to Betty's ears, I believe she would scrag that fellow with her own hands, as she is very much taken with the girl. But the great thing is not to let it get about, and I know that you will hold your tongue.

"And now, my boy, I'll walk home with you. I was on my way to see your father in any case, rather, I think, because I did not want to have any more of that young man's company than I could help. I never did like the fellow, and it's something that we've got rid of him, though I wish it had not come about just like it has. How is your father, by the way, Dick? I didn't think that he was at all himself the other day."

Dick shook his head rather sadly.

"I haven't thought him at all well since I came home this time. But it is very kind of you to come: I think it will cheer him up,"—and so they walked on together.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN INTERRUPTED SERMON.

"But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful."

The Rector of Barksworth was writing his sermon as he sat at his study table—writing in that beautiful, clear, though minute hand which was the envy and admiration of all his correspondents. He was one of those divines who entertain a conscientious objection to inflicting an old sermon upon a congregation. New lights, he would say to himself, seemed to come with new years; the old lights of the old years that were past and gone were, in comparison with the new lights of the new years, dim and shadowy.

It was just past four o'clock on a January afternoon, a few minutes before a parlour-maid had brought a lamp and poked up the fire—a staid person, who moved by habit so softly in her walk that the Rector had hardly been aware of her presence. But now, after she had gone out and closed the door, he leant back in his chair and sighed rather wearily. It was a sigh partly of sympathy for the young man who had great riches and was loath to part with them, partly of sympathy with himself, for he felt that the time had come when he must speak of the rich young man in harsh terms. Hitherto—up to this part of his sermon, that is—Mr Balfour had rather taken the young man's side, and indeed not without show of reason. For the

young man had, according to his own statement, led an exemplary life, had kept the moral law, and done his duty to his neighbours from his youth up; had neither stolen from nor offered violence to any man, and had honoured his father and his mother; and the Rector in his own heart thoroughly believed the statement. And yet there was still remaining that other and hardest of all things to do before the subject of his discourse could be pronounced perfect; and the Rector sighed as he wondered what Christian man or woman would have professed his or her readiness to give up that which was nearest to the heart all in a moment, as it were, were the treasured things worldly riches, as in the young man's case, or a favourite occupation, or a life of ease, or a dearly loved child. With the thought there came back to his mind two lines from Parnell's 'Hermit':—

> "Without a vain, without a grudging heart,
> To Him who gave me all I yield a part."

A part! well, yes, a part; that was simple enough. But this young man was called upon to sell all that he had. With the thought that the 'Hermit' might furnish further clues for the treatment of his subject, the Rector rose from his seat to reach the volume.

Just then there was a tap at the door, and the parlour-maid again walked in.

"Tea of course," muttered Mr Balfour to himself, and then aloud he said, "Oh, tell Miss May, Jane, that I will be with her in five minutes."

"It is not tea-time yet, sir, but could young Mr Loder speak to you for a few minutes?"

Young Mr Loder! what could the young man want with him, at a moment too when he was very particularly engaged with quite a different young man altogether.

"Ah, show him into the drawing-room, Jane. Miss May will give him a cup of tea."

Jane half turned round and looked at Mr Loder, who was

in truth standing close behind her in the passage; and as he, having overheard the Rector's words, shook his head vehemently in token of disapproval, she again returned to the attack.

"If you please, sir, it was you that Mr Loder asked for. I think he had seen Miss May. He wanted to see you, sir, very particularly."

"Wants to see me very particularly?" repeated the Rector, speaking rather to himself than to the servant; and then, in place of giving a direct answer to the girl, he stood quite still with one hand on the 'Hermit' and thought for a minute.

What could the young man want with him? To be sure, he had given May a dog a fortnight ago, as he fancied that the roads weren't quite safe. Perhaps the creature ought to have a muzzle or some physic or something. Or, oh yes! was not there something about a stoat or some animal that carried off one of May's pigeons? Yes, a stoat or a rat. May's dog had killed a big rat one day, on the day after it came, and had brought the creature as a sort of peace-offering to the Rector's study. But the pigeon had gone since the rat had been killed. Oh, dear! he supposed he must see the young man for a minute, and then he could pass him on or back to May, who would give him tea and get rid of him.

"Show him in, Jane," he said with a sigh—a sigh of resignation this time, and of sympathy with himself entirely. "Come in, Mr Loder," conscious by the sound of a man's footstep and the closing door that Mr Loder had entered the room. "Will you find yourself a chair and excuse me for a moment? I was just finding a book."

Mr Loder so far availed himself of the invitation as to put his hat upon a chair, evidently preferring himself to stand—a circumstance from which the Rector argued that the interview was not likely to be lengthy, and that he might soon return in peace to that other young man.

"What was it you wanted to ask me, Mr Loder?" he inquired, taking the book from the shelf as he spoke.

"If you please, sir, I came to tell you that I want to marry

your daughter, and—eh—I think that May—that is, your daughter—would be willing to marry me."

Down fell the 'Hermit' on the floor, and Mr Loder at once sprang forward, picked it up, and handed it to the Rector, who mechanically took it from his hand, mechanically drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and rubbed the book tenderly before replacing it in the shelf.

"Dear me! Mr Loder," turning round and now for the first time facing the young man. "May I ask how long ago it is since you made this—this proposition to my daughter, and she—well, yes, she, you say, partially accepted it?"

"Not only partially, sir," corrected Dick, smiling, and then answering the question. "About five minutes ago, or perhaps ten. I was waiting at your door for some little time."

"Yes."

Mr Balfour remembered that he had kept the young man waiting. To be sure it was a point in the latter's favour that he had acted thus promptly in seeking an interview with himself, the father.

"You say then, if I understand you rightly, that my daughter assented to this proposition of yours, Mr Loder?"

"Yes, sir, to a certain extent that is, subject of course to your approval."

Firmly and frankly the young man made the avowal, and Mr Balfour liked him all the better for it. There had apparently been no thought on the girl's part of being so far disloyal to her father as to pledge her troth without trying to secure his approbation,—no attempt on the young man's part to induce her so to pledge it.

"And did you expect that I should give you that approval?"

"I hoped so, sir. I love your daughter very dearly, and I would do my best to make her happy."

The low, earnest voice seemed to carry conviction, and the Rector in his own mind felt as sure of the present sincerity of the profession as he was that his other young man had according to his lights observed the precepts of the Decalogue.

"May I ask what are your visible means of supporting yourself or another, Mr Loder?" he presently inquired.

This question Mr Loder rather parried than answered. It is not, perhaps, the habit of a young man, at all times impulsive, and now at a very inflammatory age, to take into serious consideration such a very mundane question as money, when his mind is wholly occupied by thoughts of angels and divinities. Love, even though it be love in a cottage or a cart-shed, is the prime factor, and, "though blind love ye call him," has a light and airy way of imagining rather than examining ways and means.

"We did not mean to marry yet awhile, indeed, Mr Balfour. We had quite intended to wait for a year or two till May came of age, and——"

"Why till May came of age, pray!" exclaimed Mr Balfour rather sharply.

"Well, we thought that a good sort of date," explained Mr Loder; "and besides, I should have taken my degree then, and when a fellow has got his degree something is sure to turn up."

"Matrimony, apparently," remarked the rector drily,—"not always a very self-supporting institution;" and then he eyed the young man rather gravely for a minute, without speaking, as he tried to make up his mind to some definite course of action. On the whole Mr Loder's appearance impressed him rather favourably, there being no exception to be taken either to face, figure, or even dress. Moreover, he knew that Lord Leuchars held the lad in high esteem, and he had a sort of vague recollection that Laurence Ferrier had even spoken favourably of him. But why should Mr Loder come upon him suddenly like this and demand that he should give up May to him? May had only just come back to him, and she was very precious, as precious to himself—here his eye fell upon his sermon—as that young man's worldly wealth was to him. Three days hence—though it went rather against the grain to be sure, still he felt that he ought to do it—he intended to stand up in his pulpit and tell the people of Barksworth that

somewhere in that young man's nature were lurking grains of selfishness, of all faults the most obstructive to perfect goodness, that he was ready to do what came easy to him, that—— He stood self-convicted: it was the thought of his own loss which was dominant in his mind, the thought how he, lone man that he was, could ever nerve himself to resign that most priceless of earthly treasures, an only daughter. And why to this man of all others! And yet why not? The wrench would be the same whoever the man was.

He felt that he was keeping the young man waiting, and yet he pleaded for more time.

"You must excuse me for a minute or two, Mr Loder. I cannot think of all I have to think of in a moment. I wish," with some impatience, "that you would take a chair. It worries me to see you standing," and pushing a chair to his visitor he sat down himself, half turning his back on the other with a sudden fear that his face might betray the working of his thoughts. At last he spoke again.

"Will you kindly give me some more definite idea as to what are your future plans and prospects, Mr Loder—that is, what you propose to do when you have taken your degree?"

Plans! the only very definite plan in the young man's head as yet was the plan of marrying May Balfour; and prospects? the prospects of being the happiest man in the United Kingdom. But by prospects in the plural he supposed that Mr Balfour meant money prospects. Well, he had two hundred a-year—rather a vague two hundred a-year, to be sure, for he might, if his father so took it into his head, lose it altogether. Besides, even to his sanguine temperament, matrimony on two hundred a-year seemed to imply running it rather fine. "Well, sir," he confessed, "I had not thought it out as definitely as perhaps I ought to have done. It"—he refrained from exactly explaining what it meant—"all came upon me in a moment. I don't mean to say"—here he was very careful to explain—"that I haven't cared about your daughter for, for—oh, it seems ages, but I hadn't meant to speak so soon. But now you ask me,

well——" and with that he proceeded to put two alternative possibilities before the Rector, neither of which, to the young man's own thinking, looked either improbable or unpromising. There was a slight digression, half-way, when the speaker stopped to inquire not exactly what was the least sum Mr Balfour was ready to take for his daughter, but something rather like it: what was the smallest income, to wit, on which Mr Balfour thought that a man ought to marry a nice girl. On receiving no answer, he was kind enough to fix his own sum, eight hundred a-year, and then followed the two alternative courses whereby to arrive at it.

"I got a first in Mods, sir, and I think that with any luck I ought to get a first in Greats and a Fellowship. Well, with a tutorship, all told that ought to bring in quite four hundred and fifty a-year, and my father allows me two hundred, and that leaves only a hundred and fifty, and I could easily make that up by private coaching."

"Are Fellows of Colleges allowed to marry, Mr Loder?" now inquired Mr Balfour.

"Oh yes—that is, some of them are. I should be a married Fellow, of course—that is, if you think May would like the life, sir."

Before giving an answer one way or the other to the suggested question, Mr Balfour elected to listen to the other alternative proposal; and on learning that a game-mastership at a public, with the prospect of a boarding-house some time in the remote future, was pretty well certain to be within Mr Loder's grasp if he cared to accept it, he at once put his foot down upon the idea and squashed it very flat.

"That would not be at all the sort of life I should wish my daughter to live, Mr Loder. It is neither one thing nor the other. An instructor at one of our great schools should go there with a higher aim than to teach game-playing."

"Games are a very important branch of education nowadays," remarked Mr Loder, ready, as of old, to argue on that or any other point. "A fellow at Oxford who gets a Blue—

I mean, who rows in the Eight or plays in the Eleven—always has a sort of value in the market."

"Ah! perhaps it is altered since my day. I never had any particular market value that I know of just because I rowed three years in the boat."

The quietly made statement so took Dick aback that he quite forgot to argue any further.

"I didn't know you ever rowed in the 'Varsity," he remarked, now regarding his prospective father-in-law with increased respect.

"I am afraid that is not much to the purpose in any case, Mr Loder;" and having now had time to regard the matter more from his daughter's point of view, the Rector formulated a definite offer to the other.

"All this is very premature, Mr Loder. You say that you are attached to my daughter, and that she returns your attachment. Now I know very little of you myself, though I will in justice say that the little I do know is to your credit. It is to your credit, too, that you come straight to me after speaking to my daughter; and I am quite ready to believe that if circumstances, or shall we say feelings, had been entirely under control, you might have come to me first. Still, you are both very young, and as marriage, even according to your own version, is rather to be thought of as a contingency in the future than as an immediate question, this is what I propose. Come to me two years hence with the first-class and the Fellowship in your hand, Mr Loder, and then if you and my daughter are still in the same mind it will be time to discuss the feasibility of matrimony."

Mr Loder positively beamed with delight. For might he not now regard himself in the character of a suitor who had found favour in his lady's eyes and had received the sanction —to a certain extent, of course—of the lady's father to their engagement?

"You are most awfully kind, Mr Balfour!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm, "and I am sure that May——"

"Stop, Mr Loder," interrupted the Rector; "you have not heard my last word yet. During those two years I must decline to sanction any form of engagement between you two young people. You are much too young both of you to tie yourselves in any way. My daughter has hardly been out in society at all, and it is only fair that she should have the opportunity of seeing other young men, who might, you see, prove as attractive to her as yourself, and might most certainly have more definite prospects. I consider that she ought to have a fair chance of moving in society without any idea of an engagement to hamper her, and—were you going to speak, Mr Loder?"

At this period Dick had shown signs of evident anxiety to make himself heard, and now he abruptly blurted out—

"Of course I wouldn't have May tied for the world, sir; but I for my part——"

"Would be extremely foolish if you considered yourself bound to a girl who might change her mind at any minute."

"But I should know in a minute if she had changed her mind."

"How would you know? By intuition?"

"Why, she would tell me."

"Oh, dear no," explained the Rector; "I could certainly not sanction any meetings during this period of probation."

Mr Loder's face fell perceptibly, much as the Rector felt that the other young man's face must have fallen as he listened to the laying down of the crucial test of perfection."

"We should write," he suggested.

"Correspondence is apt to be more dangerous than an interview. There must be no correspondence of any kind whatsoever."

"Then we are to be separated for two whole years, and never see or hear anything of each other? How can a man live like that?"

"It seems to me, Mr Loder," said the Rector, smiling, "that you have lived, and, I hope, lived to your own credit and

enjoyment, for some twenty or more years already. Why, you have only known my daughter for a month or less."

Inasmuch as the young lady's face had been the subject of his waking and sleeping dreams for a matter of four months, this was hardly — so Dick felt — a fair assertion. But, sensible that the statement that he had fallen head over heels in love with a fair *incognita*, whom he had talked to for perhaps five minutes by the merest accident, would rather amuse than influence the older man, he did not think it expedient to enlighten him. Hard as the conditions imposed by the Rector were, it was better to accept any terms of peace than no terms at all,—to dree his weird as best he might for two long weary years, with the prospect of a happy reunion with his lady-love at the conclusion.

"Very well, sir, it shall be as you wish," he said, rather mournfully; "and now perhaps I had better go, or I might happen to see her, and it would make it all the harder;" and taking up his hat he rose from his chair, and, bowing to Mr Balfour, walked to the door.

Something in the tone of resignation touched a soft spot in the Rector's heart, and at the same moment his eye fell upon the text of his sermon. After all, this young man was for the time, at all events, very dear to the idolised daughter. Was he too, like that other one, to be sent away very sorrowful?

"One moment, Mr Loder. It is now," looking at his watch, "close on to five o'clock. Shall we say that the period of probation shall commence at six? If you go to the drawing-room very likely May would give you a cup of tea, and I think I will tell you to ask her to send my tea in to me here. Good night, Mr Loder," and he held out his hand, which Dick, not trusting himself to speak, warmly grasped.

"Your father, darling," he was saying an hour later, "treated me so kindly that I must not be a minute behind my time. Good-bye, my May."

"Not good-bye at all, but au revoir, sir. Jacob had to wait seven years for his wife, so there!"

"And then married the wrong girl after all. Well, I shan't do that at all events. Then it is au revoir, my May."

With one fond embrace parted the boy and girl, who had bravely struggled in that hour of grace by light word and merry jest each to cheer the other's fainting heart; and while he, going forth into the outer darkness, walked slowly and sadly homewards, she hurried to her own room, and completely breaking down, lay there weeping her heart out.

CHAPTER XX.

DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

"Richard Milton Loder, deceased.

"Pursuant to the statute 22nd and 23rd Victoria, chapter 35, Notice is hereby given that all creditors and persons having any claims or demands against the estate of Richard Milton Loder of Loders, in the County of Westhampton, who died on the 14th day of January 18—, Intestate, and in whose estate letters of administration have been taken out by Graham Loder of Loders, in the County of Westhampton aforesaid, are requested to send in written particulars of their debts, claims, or demands to me, the undersigned, the solicitor for the said administrator, on or before the 4th day of April next, after which date the said administrator will proceed to distribute the assets of the said deceased amongst the parties entitled thereto, having regard only to the claims of which the said administrator shall then have had notice, and he will not be liable for the assets of the said deceased, or any part thereof, so distributed to any person of whose debt or claim he shall not then have had notice.

"Dated this 30th day of January 18—.

"Laurence Ferrier,
Lincoln's Inn, London,
Solicitor for the said Administrator."

Such was the notice that appeared in the 'Times,' in the 'Westhampton Gazette,' and in several other newspapers, some three weeks after the events recorded in the previous chapter.

Richard Loder of Loders had gone the way of all flesh, dying quite suddenly at the last, though he had for some time been perceptibly ailing, a victim—so the doctors said—to his own inordinate obstinacy,—obstinacy, alas! of that type too often shown by the lords of creation, who put off till too late the disagreeable task of living in accordance with strict rules of dietary.

"If you persist in drinking port wine in the quantities you do drink night after night, Mr Loder, I tell you fairly that I cannot hold myself responsible for the consequences."

And as Mr Loder chose to turn a deaf ear to the doctor's remonstrance, the end came more rapidly and more suddenly than even the doctor had anticipated.

And Graham was now Loder of Loders, a king who had succeeded to a kingdom whose fair provinces were lying waste and neglected, whose treasury was emptied, whose resources were permanently crippled.

There had been no will left of any kind whatever, but practically that mattered but little: the property—such as it was—was entailed upon Graham; of ready money there was a complete dearth; the accounts—such again as they were—were in so complete a state of confusion that the only point which seemed to be absolutely certain was that a considerable balance was owing to the bank.

"I don't know where to start," Graham had said to Lord Leuchars in positive despair; "there seems to be no beginning and no end to anything."

"I should think your lawyer would find both beginning and end, my dear fellow."

"It is all very well to say my lawyer. But what lawyer? My poor father's lawyers were those Porters at Westhampton. From what I could make out, they had pretty considerable claims

against the estate themselves, and it is like putting one's head into a shark's mouth to invite them to help themselves first and leave me the pickings. Don't you agree with me?"

"Perfectly," assented Lord Leuchars. "It is a pity that your father should have gone to such men at all, and it seems to me that you are very likely to have a good deal of trouble with them. I neither like the men nor their methods. Look here, Graham, do you go to my friend Laurence Ferrier. He is a thoroughly good fellow as well as being a remarkably clever lawyer, and I am perfectly certain that if you put yourself unreservedly into his hands you will never repent it."

"Mr Laurence Ferrier! Do you think he would really care to trouble himself about it? I do know him slightly; of course Dick knows him well—he has been very kind to Dick. Do you think he really would not mind my asking him?"

"I'll ask him myself, my boy, if it comes to that. And I do not think that I should even have to make a personal favour of it either. From remarks I have heard Laurence drop, I happen to know that he would do a good deal for Master Dick or for Dick's brother. I will write to him to-day and ask him if he can run down for a day or two. And mind, if he does come, Graham, put yourself as thoroughly and completely into his hands as if he were your doctor. Half measures and half confidences are no good with either lawyers or doctors. If your poor father had only made up his mind to that, he would have been alive now, Graham."

"True," and Graham sighed as he spoke, "I am afraid that in his case the lawyer was trusted too much and the doctor too little."

Two days later Laurence Ferrier arrived on the scene of action, and at once assumed the control of Graham's affairs.

"Now, Mr Loder," was almost his first remark, "I am only too glad to put my poor services at your disposal. But let me clearly understand one thing first. To what degree are you prepared to trust me and to be guided by my advice?"

"Absolutely and entirely is the answer to both questions, Mr Ferrier," said Graham, smiling.

"Good; now the next thing. Can you put a room at my disposal for a couple of days—not a bedroom, as I will sleep at the Mote, but a room from ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, and then I can go through this pile of papers? and I should like to have your father's cheque-book and pass-book, and with these I can perhaps get things clear in my own mind."

And for two days the lawyer worked assiduously in what had been old Mr Loder's den, only stopping for half an hour in the middle of the day, when he drank a glass of sherry, ate a couple of biscuits, and smoked a cigarette.

On the evening of the second day he stopped to tea at Loders, and then took the opportunity of reporting progress to Graham.

"Now, Mr Loder, I am going to tell you plainly that things look black, but you will please to remember that in a case like this there are always two proverbs to fall back upon—'It is a long lane that has no turning,' and 'There is a silver lining to every dark cloud.' The lane is that the rent-roll has gone on diminishing steadily for the past ten years, and till I go into the matter thoroughly I am not prepared to say when the turning will come. And your black cloud is a very heavy load of liabilities, by far the largest part of which is due to those very estimable gentlemen, Messrs Porter & Porter, who seem in the first place to have advanced pretty well any sums your father asked for, and, in the second place, to have charged whatever rate of interest they thought suitable—there."

"Of course they were the family lawyers," murmured Graham.

"Family lawyer is, I am sorry to say, occasionally only another name for a family robber, Mr Loder. And, as I hope your walls have no ears, I think that I may say that I have no earthly doubt that it has been so in this instance. From what I gather out of certain payments in the pass-book, they

probably hold a pretty considerable mortgage on your property at a something more than pretty considerable rate of interest. Now that mortgage must be liquidated forthwith, and a new mortgage at a reasonable rate effected, so there is your silver lining for you."

"I don't see where the money is to come from," answered Graham, rather despondently.

"You may leave that to me—I will engage to see that the money is found when it is wanted; but in the meantime we must get at the exact amount that will be required. And as it is always better to get the other party to show their hand, we will try. By the way, did you ever play poker, Mr Loder?"

"Never in my life," exclaimed Graham, rather taken by surprise at the suddenness of the inquiry.

"Then you don't appreciate the full advantage of bluff. I only played once myself in a country-house for small sums, but I played quite long enough to discover that bluff sometimes succeeds where good cards fail. Now here is my bluff," and with that he handed him the notice which he had already prepared.

"But I haven't taken out letters of administration," objected Graham.

"We apply for those to-night if you will kindly sign this letter and this document." Graham signed without a moment's hesitation, without troubling himself even to look at the contents of either the one or the other.

"You have taken your first pill well, Mr Loder," remarked Ferrier, who had noted with some amusement that both papers had been signed unread. "How do you know that you have not signed away to me the possession of the estate?"

"I should know it was in good hands if I had," replied Graham, laughing; "anyhow, I would rather you had it than Porter & Porter."

"Perhaps so; and now that I have got, we will say, the Loder estate in my pocket, I will wish you good night, Mr

Loder, and good-bye too. For you must not expect to hear anything more of me for a fortnight at least, three weeks very likely. We cannot, I fear, expect everybody to take their medicine quite as easily as you do. When I want you I will write, and then perhaps you would come and stop for a night with me in London."

It was more than three weeks before the expected summons came in the form of an invitation to spend three days with the Ferriers in the Cromwell Road; and as Graham's leave had nearly expired, he prepared to join his regiment, who were at the Wellington Barracks, at the conclusion of his visit.

"Now, Mr Loder," said Ferrier after dinner, as he pushed the decanter to his guest, "help yourself to another glass, as I can promise you that you will want some support,—not that things are so bad that they mightn't have been worse. However, it is a long story, and so I have told my wife that she must not expect us in the drawing-room for an hour at least."

"Things were black, then?" said Graham, helping himself.

"Rather so. Cards were bad, that is, but bluff partially redeemed them. And now to begin. Quite a fortnight after the publication of your notice I was sitting in my office, when I was informed that a Mr Porter wanted to see me, and there was ushered into my room a very ordinary specimen of the genus country solicitor—fat, unctuous, elderly, dressed like a well-to-do undertaker, fob, gold watch, spectacles, freshly blacked boots, all complete. That day our interview was very short, three remarks on either side. Mr Porter was at a loss to understand the meaning of this notice. Mr Ferrier was a busy man himself, but his clerk for a small consideration would no doubt be happy to give Mr Porter a few lessons in elementary law. Mr Porter, or rather Messrs Porter & Porter, had always acted for the late Mr Loder. Mr Ferrier, as the present Mr Loder's legal adviser, had no reason to doubt the accuracy of Mr Porter's statement. Mr Ferrier perhaps was not aware that the Messrs Porter had very considerable claims against the late

Mr Loder's estate? It was with the object of arriving at a clear statement of all claims against the late Mr Loder's estate that Mr Ferrier's notice had been published.

"Then it turned out that Mr Porter had not come armed with any documentary evidence, but only with the intention of discussing points on an amicable footing. That, I don't mind telling you, Mr Loder, at once suggested to me the idea that he wished to imply that if I held my tongue I might expect a percentage on the plunder. So I even told him very shortly that I had no time for discussion, either amicable or otherwise, and that I should require very clear proof of indebtedness before I paid money over the counter. Two days later he arrived again with a junior, and I presume the fighting, member of the firm, a less unctuous and therefore to me less objectionable person. This time they had a considerable batch of papers, which I at once impounded, much to their astonishment, and then wishing them good morning asked if it would be convenient for them to call on the following day, when I should have had time to inspect the evidence of indebtedness, and be prepared to liquidate the debt. This seemed to take them rather by surprise, and they were very reluctant to leave the papers. However, possession is something more than nine-tenths of the law in a case of this kind, and I kept the papers. The result was, Mr Loder, that I discovered that the full amount of their claim was upwards of thirty-six thousand pounds for sums advanced at different times, at varying rates of interest, and for unpaid interest. I told them frankly on the next day that I was prepared to dispute every farthing of it, either in open court, in which case I should warn the Public Prosecutor to have notes taken of the case, or before any Judge in Chambers. And I had the pleasure of pointing out to them that the one certain issue would be that the firm of Messrs Porter & Porter would be struck off the roll of solicitors. At first they tried to bluster, the young man more especially, till I warned him that I would have no shouting in my office. Finally, they used the word compromise, and then

we came to business. You are clear of the Porter family, Mr Loder, for a sum of twenty-five thousand pounds, and upon my honour, considering the absolutely free licence for plunder that your father seems to have issued to them, we have not done badly."

"But where on earth is the money to come from?" was Graham's natural inquiry.

"The money," quietly answered the lawyer, "is there, or rather it is in the pockets of two of the veriest knaves I ever had the pleasure of encountering. A client of my own, as it happened, had a very considerable sum of money awaiting investment, and is now holding a mortgage on your estate for seventy thousand pounds at three and a half per cent. Help yourself to another glass of port, Mr Loder."

The amount of his indebtedness fairly staggered Graham. If the Porters, who were the principal creditors, had been disposed of, satisfactorily disposed of as he was quite ready to admit, for not much more than a third of the sum total required, what was the destination of the far larger sum remaining? That there were many other creditors he was prepared to hear, but that their united claims would amount to a fourth part of the total remainder had never occurred to him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it seems a lot. But I suppose my poor father never paid for anything if he could help it?"

"Well, not much, apparently," answered Ferrier, "and debts have an unpleasant way of multiplying if not paid. Here is a saddler's bill, for instance, Mr Loder, which has been running for thirteen years, with an occasional fifty pounds on account, everything of course under the circumstances charged for at tip-top prices with a fairish amount of interest thrown in."

Graham fairly groaned at heart as he glanced rapidly through the bill, which he saw was receipted, and began to realise that if this one account ran to nearer a thousand than nine hundred pounds, the total indebtedness might be wellnigh anything.

"Now, Mr Loder," resumed the lawyer, "if you will lend me your attention I will just put these plain facts before you,

and we will deal in round sums. On the one hand we have seventy thousand pounds available, per contra we have paid the Porters twenty-five thousand, other creditors, including the bank, twenty-seven thousand, we will reserve three thousand in case other accounts come in, and that leaves us fifteen thousand pounds to deal with. Will you kindly keep that amount of fifteen thousand in your head while I go on to other matters?"

Graham simply nodded—it was not a difficult figure to remember.

"Well, now, I am going to ask you one or two questions, Mr Loder. Have you in the last few years, or perhaps in the last fortnight, been round the farms, or any of the farms, on your estate?"

Graham frankly admitted that neither within the years nor the weeks mentioned had it occurred to him to go over the estate. In the latter part of his father's life, as he explained, he had spent only a few weeks in each year at home, and since Mr Ferrier's visit much of his time had been occupied in writing and answering letters, and four days had been spent with Dick at Oxford. He remarked in conclusion, "Everything seemed in such a state of chaos that I really had no heart to do anything."

"Then, Mr Loder, I can see that you are unaware that, acting under the power of attorney which you were good enough to sign without inspecting, I have made a thorough change in the management of the estate, the reasons whereof I will now explain. Now what do you suppose your rent-roll ought to be, and what do you suppose it really is?"

"Well," said Graham, after a minute's reflection, "what it is I will not pretend to say, or even to guess. But I had an idea that at one time it was upwards of ten thousand a-year."

"At one time it probably was. Now, under the most favourable circumstances, we could not at the outside reckon on making it worth eight thousand. Deduct from that two thousand five hundred to pay the interest on the mortgage, three thousand to form a sinking-fund for redemption, one thousand to keep up

the necessary repairs, and you may perhaps have fifteen hundred left to live on. Are you prepared to live at Loders on fifteen hundred a-year?"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Graham; "and what is more, under the circumstances there is nothing I should dislike the idea of more than of living there."

"No particular attraction in the neighbourhood, eh?" said the lawyer drily; then as Graham winced under the remark, he went on rapidly, "Now, Mr Loder, though I am your lawyer at present I am not going to inquire into the reasons of your likes and dislikes, though I may have my suspicions,—suspicions which," and here he held out his hand to his client, "can only make me ten times more anxious to serve you. Now, I must ask you one more question, as there is a point that still requires clearing up. Am I right in supposing that you have private means of your own beyond your pay?"

"Oh yes," and with that Graham briefly explained to the lawyer the course he had adopted in relation to the disposal of the small fortune he had inherited from his mother.

"Eureka!" exclaimed the lawyer triumphantly. "That, then, explains the odd money I could not account for. Three seventy-five cash occurring half-yearly in the pass-book fairly baffled me. You have been a most liberal son, Mr Loder, and a most liberal brother. May I ask whether you mean still to continue that allowance to your brother, who, so far as I can see, is otherwise absolutely unprovided for?"

"Most certainly that must come first. It's little enough as it is, poor fellow."

"Not very poor, Mr Loder, not when he has got a brother like you—and other things. However, we will leave that. Now, are you prepared to continue to exist on the same income on which you seem to have existed for the last few years?"

"Quite prepared."

"Capital!" ejaculated Ferrier. "Now let me see, that will swell our sinking-fund for redemption to the very respectable sum of five thousand two hundred a-year; we will pay off, let

us say, five thousand a-year, and that will give us another one hundred and seventy-five pounds the first year and three fifty the second also to add to our redemption fund. Upon my honour, Mr Loder, our silk lining is getting broader as we go on. In ten years I think I can picture you as living at Loders in tolerable comfort."

"Ten years!" And Graham sighed with the thought that in ten years he would be a middle-aged man, and that the one thing which alone made money valuable to him must now be regarded in the light of a hopeless contingency.

"By the way, are we not better off than we thought?" remarked Ferrier, who had seemed to keep pace with the train of Graham's thoughts. "There is that small surplus sum of your own money on deposit at the bank, you say. It seems to me that there we have in hand the means of reducing the waiting by a year straight off."

This suggestion Graham at once negatived.

"You must forgive me, Mr Ferrier," he said, "but that particular fund is already disposed of in my own mind, so please let us leave it out of the question."

"It is out of the question, Mr Loder," replied Ferrier, smiling; "and now let us join my wife and leave that original balance of fifteen thousand pounds and the bailiff too till to-morrow night. You have taken your medicine so very nicely to-night that I really must give you time to get the taste out of your mouth before I start with a new prescription."

"I have had a very kind doctor," began Graham, but the other man at once interrupted him.

"Sort of man who breaks another fellow's arm and then can't mend it. Now then, after you, Mr Loder;" and by way of getting rid of the taste of his own share of the medicine, Laurence Ferrier, going up to the drawing-room, did so abominably tease his wife that she finally went to bed, as she laughingly declared, in self-defence.

CHAPTER XXI.

CROMWELL ROAD.

If uneasy lies the head of him that wears a crown, what shall be said of him who has succeeded to a crown, carrying with it all the anxiety, without the compensating privileges of an exalted position? "Le roi est mort, vive le roi!" But what if there is no kingdom? Were it not better to bury the new king in the grave of his predecessor than allow him to linger on and lament over that which might have been and is not,—that which he had every right to expect, and which yet will never be realised? To Graham Loder, as he lay awake that night, the full force of all that the friendly lawyer had imparted to him was coming home with almost overpowering effect—the full misery of disappointed hope was gnawing at his heart. Silent and self-contained, he had in the last years been watching his father dissipating the inheritance that should have been his, still hoping against hope that, at such time as when in the ordinary course of nature he might expect to succeed to the estate, a little retrenchment and a little judicious nursing might restore matters to a more satisfactory footing. Only within the last few hours had it been clearly put to him that for ten years to come he, the owner of Loders, would be no better off than he had been in his father's lifetime. But it was not the loss of the money itself that was torturing his heart, but the extinguishment of the last spark of hope of attaining

that which the possession of worldly riches might have secured to him. If he had carefully guarded himself against saying to Betty Lisle a word which he felt that, as a subaltern in the Guards, he had no right to say, the girl's manner had given him to understand that at whatever time he chose to say the word it would not be spoken in vain. He supposed that Betty herself might be left what for a woman the world is apt to speak of as "comfortably off,"—the eventual recipient, that is, of anything that Lord Leuchars might be able to save during his life-tenancy of the Mote estates, and probably money from insurance policies. But that was all, and if the girl was to live in the way in which she had been brought up, the man who married her must be a person of some substance, not a country squire unable to afford to live at his own place, or a subaltern in the army with practically no settled habitation.

Presently his thoughts wandered back to Laurence Ferrier's rapid but convincing calculations, and Graham found himself, not indeed doubting the accuracy of the lawyer's statements, but anxious to arrive at a more perfect understanding of sundry points that seemed to require more precise explanation. And at three o'clock in the morning he got out of bed, struck a light, and put down these points on paper, and, as if by so doing he had set his mind at rest, he shortly afterwards fell asleep.

The points were three:—

1. Would this client of Ferrier's be content to receive back the money advanced in the proposed yearly instalments?
2. What was that sum of £15,000 set aside for?
3. About the estate-management—what changes had been made?

These questions he put point-blank to the lawyer when they found themselves in the dining-room on the following evening. The first question the lawyer briefly answered in the affirmative.

"I have definitely arranged all that, Mr Loder; and now your second question, please?"

"Yes, thank you," as Graham read it off his paper; "and now the third, please? Oh, estate-management, thank you. We will call that one question, for you will see that the two points are wholly inseparable. And now let me give an account of my stewardship. Within three days after I saw you, Mr Loder, I saw that I could get no further forward in your business without going thoroughly into the estate accounts. So having, with a little assistance from Lord Leuchars, arrived at the knowledge that a certain Mr Beam, a *protégé*, by the way, of our mutual friends the Messrs Porter, practically managed the estate, I paid without your knowledge a visit of surprise at his office, a good mile away from Loders, which," and he smiled, "may account for your knowing nothing about it. I at once demanded to see the estate-books, and, not without a little persuasion, got hold of them, and carried them off to London with me. The gentleman, as pretty a scoundrel as I ever did see, was at first inclined to argue that matter too, but I produced my power of attorney, and threatened to return in company of a policeman, and he, being even more white-livered than the ordinary scoundrel of that type, eventually conceded the point. What I saw at a very cursory inspection of those accounts on my way up to London provoked me to send a land-agent friend of my own, whose manners are somewhat peremptory, to seek yet another interview with Mr Beam; and my friend had instructions to insist upon Mr Beam going in his company to inspect certain farm premises, and in the event of my suspicions being verified, furthermore to insist upon Mr Beam returning with him to London, with the alternative of spending the night in Westhampton Jail, and the prospect of eventually exchanging that place of residence for Portland, where, upon my honour, he would have found few greater villains than himself."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Graham, "what had the fellow done?"

"A good deal—quite enough to qualify him for Portland or any other place. What he had done was simply this. In

lieu of giving himself the trouble of putting any of the farm premises in repair, he had adopted the simple expedient of returning to the tenants a proportion of their rents on the understanding that such and such repairs should be done, and then never enforced the doing of any repairs at all, so that I don't think you have a single properly hung gate on your estate, Mr Loder, while a good many cow-houses, pigsties, &c., have been paid for being rebuilt six times over, and are at this moment non-existent. The plunder, I take it, has been pretty well shared between the precious Mr Beam and some of your tenants."

"Did you see Beam again?"

"Oh yes, I saw him, and, what is more, I had him down on his marrow-bones in my office. I might even have made him disgorge a little, though I don't think he had very much, as he appears to have been unfortunate in some turf speculations. And, anyhow, we had to steer clear of really compounding a felony. I did not think we should gain anything by prosecuting, but I gave him very clearly to understand that if he exchanged a word or a sign with either Porters or tenants he would be prosecuted. Then I sent my friend down with him to take possession of his offices, with instructions to clear out Beam as soon as he had done with him, and to put a detective on his track to ensure his leaving England within forty-eight hours of his dismissal."

"So I have got a new agent without knowing it?" said Graham, laughing.

"Yes, and a very good man too. I put him in quite as much in the interests of that other client of mine, about whom you were asking just now, as in your interest, Mr Loder. And I may inform you that a good deal of very necessary repair either is in course of progress or soon will be in course of progress on Mr Loder's estate, but not at Mr Loder's expense. Our agent has, I have told you, a peremptory way with him, and as some of your tenants have feathered their nests pretty considerably in the past at your father's expense, so now, where

there are the means to do it, we intend that they shall feather your nest to a small extent within the present year of grace, under fear of certain pains and penalties of the law. Later on we will see whether they will be allowed to retain their farms. But I must tell you that part of that money you wot of must go to supplement these repairs, and to do some very necessary building, and part, may I remind you, towards paying the succession-duty, which is quite likely to absorb at least ten thousand. Now have I made myself clear?"

"Really, Mr Ferrier," said Graham, after a minute's hesitation, "I cannot see how to begin even to thank you. You have done so much and——"

"Then please consider it done, my dear fellow," interrupted the lawyer. "Every hour of my work on your behalf has been an hour of intense pleasure to me. I had promised a dear friend of mine to give you a hand if the time came, and now it has partly come. But if you will prepare yourself for a further shock to your nerves and give me a patient hearing, I may tell you that I hit on a plan last night which, if it recommends itself to your favour, may materially curtail that waiting period of ten years, which might be equally wearisome to yourself and to that other friend I spoke of. I am not inquisitive about other men's secrets, believe me, my dear Mr Loder, but a lawyer is not so blind as they say that a certain little god is; and when a very sweet girl shows herself warmly interested in a young man's welfare, then even an old fogy like myself may draw his own conclusions. If I was not saddled with an encumbrance on my own account, I should be tempted to enter the lists against you, Mr Loder."

Almost with tears in his eyes Graham warmly pressed the hand which Laurence held out to him.

"I can't thank you," he said, "you won't let me, but indeed I feel your kindness more than words can say. And now if you will only tell me in what way I can shorten those ten years, I shall be even more beholden to you than I already am, if at least that is possible."

"Give up the musket and take to the malt," was the abrupt answer.

"Give up the musket and take to the malt? What do you mean, Mr Ferrier?"

"Throw up your commission and a career which of course costs you a good deal more than it will bring you in, and throw yourself heart and soul into some business which will really pay you for the time you give to it. I might have suggested the wine trade, wine being perhaps a more aristocratic commodity on the surface of it than beer. But then I felt that you might have a reluctance to palm off bad wine upon your friends, while beer, if you go in for brewing, is rather the commodity of Tom, Dick, and Harry, whose taste is not too highly educated. And besides, there is this to be said on the side of brewing. A client of mine of nearly twenty years' standing is the three-parts owner of a very good and sound business in the City, paying I may tell you at present nearer twenty than fifteen per cent. It is now for certain reasons desirable to form the business into a limited liability company, and a certain amount of stock will be offered to the public. My client and the other partners will of course retain a considerable interest in the business, and I am going to represent my client in the directorate for the present at all events. Now what I would suggest, Mr Loder, is that you should join this brewery in which my client has such a very controlling interest that there would be no difficulty about it. Now stop, don't interrupt me, please. I know exactly what you were going to say—that you know nothing more about brewing than the man in the moon, eh?"

"Partly that, I admit," said Graham, laughing, "but I was also going to suggest that it was rather hard on these other clients of yours to make them into sort of stepping-stones for me."

"That is just where you are wrong, my dear fellow. The accommodation is mutual. Where am I to find at a minute's notice an indubitably good and substantial security for eighty

thousand pounds at three and a half per cent? Now I see you want to interrupt me again. Don't, please; I know we did say seventy, but we must have that other ten to put into the brewery, and we need not bother ourselves to pay off the mortgage in too great a hurry either. For we may get the chance of getting some more of this brewery stock in the event of future capital being required, and it is obviously sound policy to get fifteen per cent for our money in, and pay three and a half out when we can. And what with the directorship at seven-fifty a-year? Now don't interrupt yet, please. Let me figure it all out. Yes, I have it. In five years, Mr Loder, if all goes well, I think I see you at Loders with a comparatively unencumbered property."

For a minute or two Graham felt as though his breath had been fairly taken away by the rapidity of the lawyer's calculations. The prospect of the curtailment of the waiting period by a space of five years seemed to open out a new range of hope. At thirty-two a man is comparatively young; at thirty-seven he may be said to have got his foot fairly planted on the third or fourth round of the ladder of middle-age. Five years! Could he possibly ask Betty Lisle to tarry for him by the way so long? No, that was beside the mark altogether, and yet—it might be that the girl unasked, and of her own free choice, might be willing so to tarry. But now he had the present and not the future to deal with.

"You go on so fast, Mr Ferrier," he said, smiling, "that it taxes all my poor brains to keep up with you. I will throw up the sponge about the mortgage. If you think it fair for all parties, I am sure that it is fair, though it is somewhat bewildering. But now about that brewery and that directorship—what possible qualification can I have to be a brewer at all, much less a director of a brewery?"

"Ah, I see you are not versed in City matters, Mr Loder. But I think I can make things clear to you. The Rhinoceros Brewery, which was started by—well, to all intents and purposes by—your humble servant himself as a small business

fifteen years ago, is now a comparatively large concern,—so large, in fact, that it is desirable now to convert it into a limited liability company, without, however, over-capitalising it. The capital will, in fact, be two hundred and fifty thousand pounds,—that is, one hundred thousand ordinary shares, one hundred thousand preference at five per cent, and fifty thousand three-and-a-half debenture stock. And one-half of this will be offered to the public. When I tell you that our annual profit has been for the last five years on an average close upon thirty-five thousand pounds, you will easily understand that we shall pay a pretty substantial dividend on our ordinary shares in addition to building up within a very few years a very useful reserve fund. There will be only three directors—myself as representing my client's interests, my client's partner, and a gentleman of considerable business experience. My client's partner will, with our full consent, retain that position as managing director which he has practically filled for the past ten years. I am in my position enabled to offer you ten thousand ordinary shares, and I propose that you should enter the brewery at once in order that you may get sufficiently behind the scenes to know something more than perhaps you know now about the manufacture of beer and the working of a brewery. And at the end of the first year's working you, instead of your humble servant, shall join the board to represent our interests as well as your own. And I can tell you plainly that you may have as much confidence in the ability and integrity of our managing director as you have extended to—well, shall we say the man to whom you gave a power of attorney without even taking the trouble to read what you were signing?"

"But why should I take—how much did you say?—seven hundred and fifty a-year out of your pocket, Mr Ferrier?"

"Partly because you will be doing my work, and partly because I tell you frankly that I have as much money already as I know what to do with. A man of my age, Mr Loder, must be expecting not very long hence—for time flies after

you have struck fifty—to be balancing the most serious of all accounts. Is it likely to go in my favour then if I shall be found to have been hoarding that which I cannot carry away with me whither I go, and which I have no particular desire to leave to any individual in this world after me? No one has any claim upon me except my dear wife, and she is more than amply provided for. If I can help a few young people whom I esteem and admire, then I may hope that my balance may be on the right side when the day of reckoning comes." And then with a sudden change of manner he added, "Besides, I want to ask you a favour. What are you going to do with Loders in the meantime?"

Again Graham Loder felt himself in an absolute state of bewilderment. A moment before the lawyer's tone had been so serious, his words so full of gravity, and yet he had seemed rather to be addressing himself than his listener. Now he had again relapsed into the clear-headed man of business, and the question he put touched upon a matter which had hardly as yet entered within the range of Graham's consideration.

"Do you know I had hardly thought about it at all; you seemed to be doing all the thinking for me. What do you recommend me to do about it, and in what possible way can I do you, who are doing so much for me, any favour?"

"Very easily: lend me Loders for the next few years, till you are ready to occupy it yourself. There is nothing to look so astonished about, my dear fellow; and mind you, I am going to drive a hard bargain. Hang it all, the new family lawyer must have some pickings. I am not even going to offer to pay you rent for it, as, though it certainly has a considerable market value as a residential abode, something tells me that you would not care to let it in the ordinary way." Graham shook his head. "Well, then, I propose just this. I will keep the house warm for you in your absence, and by way of rent I will keep it in thorough repair, and also keep on some half-dozen or so of the servants who know the ways of the place. Of course I have no intention of giving up this house, or of making Loders my per-

manent headquarters. But I want a country place to which I can run down for a week or two at a time, and perhaps leave my wife there when I have to go away from home on business. It will be a sort of earthly paradise for her with her pet May Balfour living quite handy, and with two of my oldest and dearest friends in hail I can want nothing better myself, while at the same time I can keep an eye upon the legitimate owner's interests."

Two days after the foregoing conversation Graham Loder sent in his papers, and a week later travelled down to Westhampton with Laurence Ferrier, and, having packed up what few things he required for immediate use, formally handed over the house to its new occupier; and in the course of the two days which the two men spent there in company, they walked over to the Mote, and explained to the kindly Lord Leuchars as much of Graham's new plan of campaign as Graham's quondam trustee and constant friend had an undeniable right to know. During their brief visit not only did Laurence Ferrier, having craftily managed to start off Lady Leuchars on a lengthy political diatribe, contrive to get in a word with Betty on his own account, but he so cunningly manœuvred that her ladyship and Lord Leuchars, being by way of escorting their two visitors to the end of the carriage-drive, suddenly discovered that the two younger members of the walking party had taken a good hundred yards' start of them, and showed no inclination to be prematurely overtaken.

"Well, Betty dear, we shall always remain good friends, shall we not?" said the man.

"Friends, Graham?" and there was that in the girl's voice and look which emboldened the young man to step on to still thinner ice.

"A brewer's apprentice could hardly be more to your father's daughter, Betty."

"If he were a crossing-sweeper, so long as his name was Graham Loder, my father's daughter would give her hand to him in the middle of the road, and all the world might

be looking on for all she would care;" and in a moment the consciousness that "giving her hand" might bear a double interpretation caused the rich colour to mount to the girl's face.

"In a few years he might be bold enough to ask if the heart could go with the hand," he whispered.

For a moment the girl hesitated, and then she said very softly, "And when the few years are gone, and my king shall enjoy his own again, Betty Lisle will be waiting for him, or there will be no Betty Lisle to wait."

If Lord Leuchars had laughed in his sleeve when the two young people stole a march upon their elders, Lady Leuchars made little effort to conceal her displeasure.

"Upon my honour, Betty," she exclaimed as soon as the home-party were fairly started on their homeward journey, "things have come to a pretty pass. I almost wonder that you did not ask Mr Brewer Loder to marry you right out."

"I did ask him, as a matter of fact, my dear mother; but, unfortunately, he said no."

"Betty, you shameless girl!"

"You leave Betty alone, if you please, my lady," struck in Lord Leuchars, who, studying the girl's face, had gathered the correct impression that tears were very near the surface. "Betty is a very good girl, and she shall do what she likes and marry whom she likes, provided that he is a gentleman and"—*sotto voce*—"hasn't got red hair. Why, my lady," he added aloud quite briskly, "where did that creature young Chevely's money come from except out of a brewery?" And after this there was clearly nothing more to be said.

Three days later Laurence Ferrier received a very short note:—

"You know it was all your doing, and you won't ever let me thank you. But while I live I shall always subscribe myself your loving and grateful

BETTY."

CHAPTER XXII.

A THIRD-CLASS.

A QUICK catching of the breath, a sensation as if his heart had in a moment been turned into a stone, a face for the instant as white as that of a corpse, a feeling of utter "wretchlessness"—such were the immediate effects on Dick Loder as he read in the morning paper of July 20 that his name had been placed in the third-class by the Greats examiners.

And yet it could in no way be said to come upon him in the light of an unexpected announcement. He said to himself that he had known all along how impossible it was that it could be otherwise, had known it ever since that fatal morning—the morning of the third day in the Schools—when the influenza fiend had taken a firm grip of him, when with aching head, swimming eyes, pulse and temperature alike well over the hundred, he had set his teeth and vowed that, come what might, he would go through with it. And he had gone through with it after a fashion right up to the bitter end, and then a rough but kindly nurse, Thomas Wilmington M'Gregor, had met him on the doorstep of his lodgings, whither he had staggered so blindly reeling down the street that a good-natured tradesman, who for the moment thought that the undergraduate was drunk and then discovered that he was sick almost unto death, had offered him an arm, and

had steered him across the High and down King Edward Street. Without more ado Tom had picked him up in his arms like a baby, had carried him upstairs, undressed him and put him to bed, where the doctor, who was at once summoned, declared that he ought to have been days ago.

"The pluckiest thing I ever heard of in my life, Mr M'Gregor, and yet downright insanity. He may have killed himself." Such was the form which the doctor's verdict had taken.

Dick had not killed himself as things turned out, for, being cockered up and made to take medicine and nourishment by M'Gregor, he had shaken off the malady.

But there were moments when he almost wished that people had allowed him to "go under." What was the good of living — existing, as he chose to call it — with the old cheery hopefulness extinguished, with nothing, literally nothing, to live for?

It was good of the dear old President, lame and infirm as, alas! he now was, to insist upon struggling all the way to King Edward Street, and there, declining to leave a message, to mount the two flights of stairs and sit by the young scholar's bedside and tell him how richly he had merited, even if he might not have gained, the highest honours; to assure him that he had done more for the College than any other young man in his day, not only by reason of his First in Moderations and his brilliant achievements in the playing-fields, but by the example he had set to other young men of doing with all his heart that which he had taken in hand to do.

"Believe me, Mr Loder, it will be worth many a first-class in the years to come."

Mockery! mockery! mockery! As well tell a child who has cut a finger that we work out our salvation by patient suffering.

It was a kind thought of one examiner, reputed to be the grimmest of all the grim men who sit in the Schools, to give up an hour of his precious exercise time in those hard-working

days and come down to St Hilary's and insist upon seeing the Dean, in order to find out whether any family trouble had "upset that young Loder from your College"; kinder still of him, when he had learnt the truth, to intrust the Dean with a message to the effect that whenever Mr Loder had cause to give a reference, or to require a testimonial written, he would be only too glad to testify that Mr Loder's paper-work in the first two days of the examination had been especially brilliant, —far above the standard of the ordinary first-class work.

Mockery! Mockery! Mockery! As well tell a baby in arms not to cry when the teething pains are on him; as well tell the owner of the Derby favourite which has broken down in the race to rejoice and be glad because his horse must have won if it had not so broken down.

Yes, Dick had known it for a full month past, known it as surely as if it had at once been published in the newspapers, known it still better a week ago, when, as he sat down in the chair for his *vivâ voce*, there had been a sympathetic ring in the voice of each examiner, when they had dealt with him, one and all of them in turn, as men who be gentlemen will deal with their fellow-man, old or young, when they know him to be the victim of a great and undeserved misfortune. And yet in the very face of absolute and damning conviction he had gone on hoping when he knew that there was no hope, hoping like the condemned criminal whom the jail governor has assured upon his word of honour that there is not the slightest vestige of a chance of a reprieve, hoping perhaps that a flood might come and destroy the world before the class-list came out—for nothing short of a miracle could save him.

And now there it was, staring him in the face; and to-day not he alone, but every man and woman in England who read the paper, knew or might know that Richard Loder of St Hilary's had been placed in the third-class. Why had the examiners not ploughed him altogether, or at any rate why had they not gulfed him so that his name should never have appeared in the newspapers at all?

And how hard he had read, how steadily he had stuck to it, what pleasures had he not denied himself! He had resolutely declined the captaincy of the 'Varsity Eleven, which in days gone by he would have given his ears to have held, and had definitely stated at the beginning of the season that he would under no consideration whatsoever play at Lord's, even though no trial match was expected of him.

"Not I," he said to the new captain. "You don't imagine that I should think of coming in and upsetting your side at the eleventh hour, and cut out some poor beggar who has been sweating for his colours the whole season. It's very nice of you to ask me, old chap, and all that, but I am sure that I am right."

And then he had gone up to the Parks and had had his daily knock at the nets by way of exercise, and now and again had looked on at a match for an hour or two, and given his advice when consulted, just by way of showing that he and cricket were not upon permanently bad terms.

In the Easter vacation, with Tom M'Gregor's connivance, he had spent a fortnight at Elmscroft with the idea of availing himself of Charles Ingram's assistance, and had fairly astonished the latter by his thorough and intelligent grasp of his subjects.

"Come, come, my dear fellow, this is all very fine. If it was a matter of scholarship, I might perhaps be able to give you a wrinkle or two; but I tell you frankly that in my best day I never had my history and philosophy all ready at my fingers' ends like you have. My one bit of advice to you is to take three clear days off before the schools begin, and then I can't see what is to stop you."

This well-meant advice Dick had followed to the letter, giving himself three days' rest, and on the third, going down to the river to have a quiet scull, had been run down by a blundering freshman and had caught a chill, which had culminated in influenza.

And now here was the end of things, a third-class, with

about as much chance of winning a fellowship as of getting the Lord Chancellorship or the Archbishopric of Canterbury, those two things which in the past Lord Leuchars had hinted at as within the range of possibility. Who was going to take the trouble to read through the papers of a man who had only taken a third when the field would be likely to comprise two or three men at the very least who had taken firsts in the same examination?

Tom M'Gregor, with whom Dick was staying in a cottage taken by the former hard by the river bank in the neighbourhood of Pangbourne, studying his companion's face at the breakfast-table, gathered from the expression he saw there that Dick had seen his fate in the paper, and wisely determined to make no present allusion to the class-list. In the past month Tom had stuck to his part of dry-nurse to a very fractious charge manfully and patiently, never letting Dick out of his sight for ten consecutive minutes in the day-time if he could possibly avoid so doing, bearing with moods, caprices, and outbreaks of temper, wondering what the end of it all would be, whether the change would be for the better or the worse when the doom was once finally pronounced.

Not knowing all, he had guessed a good deal in the past year and a half, divining correctly that in some way or another a woman's shadow had crossed the path of the lad whom he had now taken thoroughly into his heart, causing serious purpose for the future to take the place of a cheerful, if somewhat careless, enjoyment of the present good of existence. Thoroughly admiring the stern determination with which Dick stuck to his work, Tom had more than once chuckled to himself over his young companion's quaint little bits of economy—economy that never degenerated into meanness; and from the evident pride with which he had regarded the fact of having a balance of a whole hundred and seventy pounds in his bank-book, Mentor wisely argued that if there was a young lady in the case she was certainly not a great heiress. And now within the last few days Dick had planked

down a ten-pound note, when their milk-purveyor had come round with a pitiful tale, a true tale as it did so happen, of having lost her one cow.

"I don't want to beg, sir, indeed," the unhappy woman had said, "but a few friends have put together a trifle, and I knows the cow I could get, sir, for a matter of seventeen pounds, as I was to have it two pounds cheaper than any one else," and she had produced her little list of subscribers.

"Why, you're not half-way there yet, mother," said Dick as he totted up the amounts and found that it was just short of eight pounds. "There, now," and he put down a ten-pound note, "trot along and buy your cow, and a new cap into the bargain."

"Dick, old chap, I must go halves in that!" exclaimed M'Gregor, who had had no time to interfere before Dick had dismissed the woman.

"You be hanged!" was the rough answer, immediately to be followed by "No, I didn't mean that at all; it is very good of you to suggest it, old Tom. But there, it's over and done with now. The old woman has gone off happy, and what the devil is the good of the money to me—now?"

How difficult it is to start a topic for conversation with a man when the one natural topic is that which of all others had better be at any cost avoided!

It was not till half-way through breakfast that M'Gregor suddenly exclaimed—

"I say, young man, do you remember that we promised to play cricket for those locals to-day? Do you feel up to it?"

"Cricket? Had we promised to play cricket? Oh yes, of course, I remember now. Up to it? What rot! Of course I am up to it. Cricket let it be by all means—one can't sit and mope all day; oh yes, cricket by all means."

And in due course of time the pair found themselves on the Streatley cricket-ground. How Dick ever got there he did not exactly seem to know, or why he had come. Oh yes though, he was going to play cricket of course; for

here was a long thin man, who was "most awfully glad to see Mr Loder." They were going to have a fine day, he thought, and they had lost the toss, and where would Mr Loder like to field· perhaps Mr Loder would bowl?

No, Dick thought he wouldn't bowl: there were ten other men on the side. Why shouldn't some of them bowl? Of course there were only nine men, now he came to think about it, as Tom M'Gregor didn't bowl, but some of the other men were sure to want to bowl.

Mr Loder would field in the country, would he? It was so kind of Mr Loder to field in the country—they had all heard of Mr Loder's fielding, and now they were going to see it.

Truth to say, there was not very much to see after all. A man with no heart in the game is hardly likely to field very much better than his neighbours, even though force of habit may have decreed that it is next door to impossible that he should field much worse than some of them. Dick seemed to be slumbering or awake by fits and starts, for perhaps five minutes at a time concentrating his attention, or at least trying to concentrate his attention, on the game, putting in some brilliant work in the long field and bringing off a great gallery catch, then for the next quarter of an hour so hopelessly indifferent to what was going on around him as to forget to go at all for a very easy chance, thereby causing the bowler to dance wildly round the wicket and appeal to society at large to know whether "they called that cricket."

Would Mr Loder go in first? Oh dear yes, first or last, or second or tenth—anywhere where anybody liked.

First then, please.

And so he went to the wicket, and hit the ball once or twice, and more often let it hit his bat, and then he thought he would run himself out, and ran the other man out by mistake, and said "sorry," and wondered why the other man looked so cross, and then suddenly woke up with a start.

For one of the bowlers was talking to him, and this is what the bowler, a very shy young man, was saying:—

"I think you have forgotten me, Loder; I played with you twice in College matches,—Brown of Keble, you know. I am so awfully glad you got your class."

Dick muttered something in acknowledgment of the courtesy, and then lapsed into reverie again, only to awake a minute later and realise that he had just received the first ball of a fresh over from Brown of Keble, and that the latter had had the impertinence to send him down a yorker which only just missed the off stump.

Oh, it was Brown of Keble, was it, who had bowled that ball, the man who had congratulated him upon his class! Brown of Keble indeed! He would teach Brown of Keble better manners, and with that—

Ball No. 2 should have been another yorker by rights. Fair and square Dick caught it full-toss in the very centre of his bat.

New ball, please; you shall find that in the middle of a neighbouring cornfield in the course of next month.

Ball No. 3, really well pitched, something better than a half-volley, if a man has made up his mind to have a hit! There was fortunately no cornfield on the far side of the hedge behind the bowler, so that the new ball presently came back again.

Ball No. 4 went about thirty yards farther over the same hedge, owing the extra velocity with which it hurtled through the air to the fact that it was pitched about four feet shorter than its predecessor.

No. 5, the last of the over, pitched in sheer terror and despair rather nearer the bowler's than the batsman's end. Dick with a grim smile waited for and hit with a full swing of bat and body fully twenty feet over the top of the refreshment tent on the leg side. Measuring the hit as nearly as they could, it was calculated to be from hit to pitch a hundred and thirty yards at the very least.

A new bowler took Brown's place, a parson who in the seventies had been a tidy performer; and him Dick Loder, with sudden and savage resolve to heap further indignity on the unhappy Brown's head, allowed to hit the wicket with a straight plain ball, and then retired smiling.

It was not till ten o'clock that night that Tom M'Gregor, having filled a fresh pipe by way of giving himself more confidence, thus approached Dick Loder with a proposition that had been on his mind all day.

"It has made an awful muddle of your plans, I'm afraid, this silly class-list."

Dick nodded and sighed.

"A bit," he said.

"Dick, old fellow, I have never told you yet. I didn't like to, somehow. But you and I will some time next year be cousins."

Dick stared at him.

"Why not brothers at once?" he said, after a moment's pause. "Indeed, old Tom, you have been more than a brother to me in all these—these horrid weeks. Beast that I have been. I have felt it all the time, Tom, only I have been put so vilely out of joint. But there—what do yo mean about cousins?"

"I am going to marry Elsie, that's all."

"You marry Elsie!" with wide opened eyes; and then after a moment, "Oh, Tom, I am so glad! Now tell me all about it."

"Well, it was this way,—when poor old Sir Henry was ill and you were so busy, I saw a good deal of them. And the week before he died—you were in bed of course—I saw that he was worried about Elsie. And so I asked him if it would make things easier if I undertook to provide for her, if she could care for me, that is"—with a smile—"and the poor child said she could, and the old man was so pleased, and—well, I think you know all about it now."

"Oh, Tom, I am so glad. You dear cunning old thing! And my little Elsie. But where is she, Tom? Oh," rising from his

chair as he spoke and commencing to walk rapidly up and down the little room, "what a selfish pig I have been, keeping you here all this time when you must have been longing to go to her."

"Sit you down, man, and don't talk nonsense. Elsie is all right. She and the old lady—Miss Firchild, I mean—are gone off to pay a long visit to the Ingrams, and then they go on to the Trehernes. They have both been so good about asking her, and anyhow, we are not going to be married till next year. But now listen to me for a moment. We shall be real cousins, shan't we? and, Dick, you will let me help you through this bother. I know that you wanted that fellowship so much, and I can't help thinking you wanted it for something of the same sort as we have been talking about,—Dick, dear Dick, if you only knew how much more stuff I have got than I can ever possibly want. You will let me help my Elsie's cousin, won't you?"

And it was then that Dick understood that M'Gregor was offering to put it into his power to get that which his soul was so sorely longing for.

Tick. Tick. Tick. For several minutes there was no other sound in the room as Dick sat with his head buried in his hands while the other man watched him, first anxiously, then hopefully.

Suddenly Dick rose from his chair, picked up a bedroom candle, and lighted it.

"If I could have taken it from any man in the world," he said very slowly, "I would have taken it from you, dear old Tom, dear cousin Tom, dear brother, and more than brother, Tom. But you know, old man, it could not be. God bless you for the thought, Tom; God bless you and dear little Elsie."

And laying one hand for a moment on the other's shoulder, he walked to the door and then up to his room, and there completely broke down, this last evidence of true friendship having finally overthrown the barrier of unnatural self-restraint which had in the past weeks been torture to him.

Half an hour later Dick Loder was on his knees by his bedside, and this is what he prayed for—that he might soon pass out of May's heart and out of her thoughts, that the shadow of his memory might never come between her and her happiness; that soon some other man, such another as Tom M'Gregor, if there was such another, might take what had been his place in May's affections, loving her as deeply as he himself would ever love her, as deeply loved by her; and that he himself might so live his life through—not a long life, he hoped, but long or short, no matter—as never to do or say that which might misbeseem the man whom May Balfour had once thought worthy of her heart's love.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EN ROUTE TO LONDON.

"D—N the paper!" exclaimed the Bursar, and with that he flung it out of the window, having previously subjected it to every indignity that he could think of, and maltreated it after a fashion in which that eminently respectable paper, the 'Morning Post,' is seldom accustomed to find itself maltreated. For the Bursar had rolled it up into a ball, had thrown it on to the floor of the railway carriage, had stamped on it, tried to poke the point of his umbrella through it, and failing in that attempt, had now dismissed it with his blessing. And when he had quite finished all this, having adjusted his spectacles, he pulled out his tobacco, and commencing to fill his big pipe, looked up to see that the only other occupant of the carriage, a man quite as tall though certainly not as substantially built as himself, was regarding him with some little astonishment not unmingled with amusement.

"A parson, too!" muttered the Bursar to himself, "and a non-smoker, too, I'll be bound. What the devil does he want in here?" and then feeling that his late exhibition of temper seemed to call for an apology, he abruptly asked his fellow-passenger whether by any chance he objected to smoking.

"Not in the least, thank you. I am not a smoker myself, and I had only just this minute noticed that I had got into a

smoking-carriage. But I rather like the smell of tobacco in moderation."

At the very first word the clergyman had spoken the Bursar had pricked up his ears.

"Seem to know your voice," he thought to himself; and as the other man was now reading the newspaper he took the opportunity of examining him through his spectacles.

"Seem to know your face too, my friend," he muttered, and then by way of satisfying his curiosity on the point of knowing or not knowing his companion he reopened conversation.

"I'm afraid I was rather unkind to that paper," he remarked, "but when a man has been standing at a station, like Marsh-Gibbon, waiting for a train that is nearly an hour late, and then has only just time to hustle across the platform at Bletchley to catch his train, and thinks himself lucky to be able to snatch a paper, only to open it at the one—eh!" he just managed to swallow the expletive—"thing he has known for a month, and didn't want to know at all, it is rather trying to the temper."

"Stale news," said the other with a smile, "is never interesting, and commonly annoying. I hope it was nothing very serious."

"Serious! very serious for a poor boy I know—such a nice lad, too. As safe a first-class as ever went into the Schools, and now here he is with a third."

"Oh, indeed, and how, may I ask?" and the clergyman's tone betrayed a certain amount of interest as well as of polite sympathy.

"Knocked flat by influenza in the middle of the examination. He should have gone to bed by rights instead of sticking to it. A University man yourself by any chance?"

"Oh yes, I was at Oxford."

"Oxford? Corpus? Lionel Balfour? Lionel Balfour it is, or my name is not Holmes. Why, Balfour, my dear old man, how are you?" and in a minute the two old 'Varsity oarsmen, who had rowed in the boat together nearer forty than thirty years ago, were shaking hands with all the heartiness

of their old-time friendship. They rowed every inch of the course again in company, they went long training walks together, they did not even forget to condemn the coxswain who had very nearly fouled a stationary barge, and the train had made its last stop, before Willesden, at Harrow before they returned to the original subject of conversation.

"And what about your young friend, Holmes?"

"Oh, young Loder? A cruel case, a cruel case. Just listen;" and the Bursar rapidly sketched the young scholar's career, laying no small stress upon the way in which Dick had in the last eighteen months buckled to his work, leaving no stone unturned to achieve success. "And the lad," he said in conclusion, "had set his heart on getting a fellowship, and now has as much chance as the man in the moon. Of course if we had a vacancy ourselves there would be no question about it. We should elect him straight off, if the devil himself stood against him. But you know what d—d fools other people are, Balfour."

"And what very forcible language is required for them!" said the Rector of Barksworth, laughing. "Oh dear, Willesden, and I must get out. Good-bye, my dear Holmes, so glad to have met you again. Your conversation has been most interesting."

But how had these two old acquaintances foregathered in the train? How the Bursar got there is a very simple story. He had been staying on at Oxford, busy with accounts, and finding it necessary to pay a visit to some farms belonging to the College a few miles beyond Bicester, had stopped the night with an ex-Fellow who held a College living, and was travelling back to Oxford *viâ* London, where he had an appointment with the Charity Commissioners.

And Mr Balfour? It had long been evident to the Rector of Barksworth that his daughter's affections were indeed deeply engaged, and that neither absence nor silence had in any way shaken her allegiance to the young man who had so audaciously attacked him in his study and asked for his daughter's hand.

True, father and daughter had avoided the subject by mutual consent, and now that Loders was no longer occupied by the family there was no reason why the young man's name should ever be mentioned. May had gone about her ordinary household duties with cheerful composure, had abated not one whit of her sweet affection for her father, had spent and thoroughly enjoyed two London seasons under Mrs Ferrier's wing, and had been universally admired. Beyond the bounds, however, of legitimate admiration no one among the many young men who swore by the girl's beauty and felt the attraction of her presence had ever been either encouraged or permitted to trespass. Other men might enjoy the privilege of Miss Balfour's friendship; one, and one alone, had ever really touched her heart.

"Deuced pretty girl, you know, old chap; but she hasn't got the faintest idea how to flirt." And the young gentleman who made this discovery was by no means singular in his views regarding May's incapacity or unwillingness to play with edged tools.

Yes, in his inner consciousness was ever present to Mr Balfour the conviction that his daughter intended to hold fast by her lover, and at the same time he was no less certain that the latter had in no form whatever violated the promise given that winter evening in the study at Barksworth that he would hold no communication with the girl until the two years' period of probation had expired. Fairly and squarely had the young man kept his bargain, as fairly and squarely as Mr Balfour, watching the working of his face that night, had argued to himself that it would be kept. And so more than eighteen months had sped away, and within the last fortnight, the last fortnight only, May had shown signs of low spirits and depression. A rumour had reached her ears on the day before she left London—a chance word overheard at the University match—"Loder of Hilary's had muckered his Schools; pity he hadn't played at Lord's instead of worrying about them."

Poor May! She got away from the ground and back to the Cromwell Road as best she could, and then to her room to have a good quiet cry by herself. And then she wiped her eyes, and like the brave, plucky girl she was, tried to console herself with the thought that things often looked or sounded worse than they really were, and did her very best to be cheerful, and even fancied that she was succeeding. But certain dark lines under the eyes and other similar symptoms did not escape the notice of the old and faithful Anne, now installed at the Rectory as May's maid and deputy housekeeper, and she shortly confided to the Rector her belief that her darling was fretting, and he in consequence, watching his daughter more narrowly, arrived at the same conclusion.

On that particular morning he had come into the breakfast-room to find his 'Times' lying on the floor and his daughter gazing out of the window into space; and if, as she turned to meet him, the sweet lips made brave attempt to frame a smile of morning greeting, he could not help seeing the tears standing in her eyes and the hopeless misery in her face. A hurried glance at the paper, not so hurried as to prevent his taking in what was troubling her, and even before he had rung the bell to summon the servants to prayers the Rector's mind was made up. Realising for the first time to the full extent the fact that there had come into his daughter's heart that for which girl and boy alike will leave father and mother and in blind trust shower the fresh young love upon a comparative stranger—worthy or unworthy as may hap—he felt that only one course was open to him, felt that he who had preached resignation to the poor folk of Barksworth must not be found wanting now that he himself was called upon to resign the sweet companionship which had become a part of his very existence.

If he hardly spoke to May at breakfast it was only because he was so busy with the thought of the ways and means to secure her happiness.

"The Ferriers are in London still, May?"

"Yes; they are to be there another week."

"Then," as he rose and rang the bell, "please send word to the stables that I shall want to catch the ten o'clock train—I must go and write a telegram." And with that he abruptly left the room, and on second thoughts despatched two telegrams to Laurence Ferrier—one at his office and one at his private residence.

"Coming up to see you at once at office—urgent."

Half an hour later he was standing on the step of the front door, and it was then that May, who had been helping him to collect hat, umbrella, and so forth for his journey, turning rather sadly away, found her father's arm thrown round her neck and heard her father's voice in her ear.

"Cheer up, my sweet one; things in this world are never so bad that they may not be mended. I shall be back to-night."

Having thus hurriedly rushed off to London with the intention of talking matters out with the lawyer—who, as he knew, was generally in communication with one or other of the two young men—the Rector, as it may be surmised, was devoutly grateful for the satisfactory information which his chance meeting with his old companion-in-arms had procured for him.

"I would trust Holmes's estimate of a young man against that of any one I know, except, perhaps, Laurence," he murmured to himself on his way to the lawyer's office; "and if Laurence only knows where the young man is, it ought to be all plain sailing."

CHAPTER XXIV.

LETTERS.

"Odd that the Bursar should not have sent me a line," remarked Dick Loder, as he sat down to breakfast somewhere about eleven o'clock on the morning after the black-letter day. "I almost thought he would have written."

In ignorance that people from afar had been putting their heads together to restore his fallen fortunes, even in the very hours when all things seemed to be against him, Dick had slept that night as he had never slept since the night before the Schools, when he had gone to bed with the easy conscience of a man who has every reason to be hopeful of success. The sleep from which he had now but lately roused himself had been the sleep not of a man desperate, but rather of one worn out body and soul, to whom nature has at length vouchsafed most sorely needed and most blessed relief. If the young man seemed to himself to have drained to the bitter dregs the cup of disappointment, the proof of loyal and unswerving friendship that Tom M'Gregor had sent him off to bed with, bringing him back to his better self, had acted like a powerful soporific, and brought rest to a sorely troubled spirit.

Looking into his room at eight o'clock in the morning and finding him sleeping like a child, M'Gregor had given orders that he was on no account to be disturbed, had stolen downstairs, eaten a solitary meal, and finally had put under some

papers the one letter that had come for Dick, with the feeling that the latter would probably eat all the better breakfast, when he did elect to come downstairs, if he was not worried by correspondence.

"Clerk of the Schools, I take it," he said to himself as he looked at the Oxford post-mark and failed to identify the handwriting. "You'll keep, my friend."

But when at ten o'clock a telegram arrived for Dick, with a prepaid reply form, Tom was rather put to it to know what to do.

"Shall I take it up to Mr Loder?" inquired the servant.

"Certainly not, and you can tell the boy to go, and take up the answer yourself later. Dash it all!" he went on to himself as the man retired, "I suppose I must wake the fellow after all. But you'll have to wait too, my friend, till he has eaten something."

And accordingly the telegram had gone with the letter, and Tom had reason to congratulate himself on the success of his strategy when his patient finally appeared downstairs and ate a very respectable breakfast. It was only when Dick got to the marmalade stage that he began to wonder why the Bursar had not written.

"Oh, by the way," said Tom, leisurely getting up from his seat and putting down the paper which he was reading, "there is a letter for you somewhere, and a wire. Letter isn't from the Bursar though, at least it is not his writing. Here, catch," and he threw the letter and telegram across the room.

Dick hurriedly tore open the telegram.

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed, "how long has this been here?"

"Half an hour or more."

"Well, I must answer it. Ferrier wants me to dine and sleep in London. No particular hurry though. I'll look out a train presently. Now, what's this?" and he opened the letter.

As he hurriedly for the first time, and then again more carefully, ran through the contents, M'Gregor, watching his face,

and reading thereon first bewilderment and then emotion, almost involuntarily exclaimed—

"What is it, old fellow?"

"Only this, look," and handing the letter to M'Gregor, Dick rose abruptly from his chair, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, walked to the window, and so stood there looking at nothing in particular.

The letter was from Lewis, the mathematical lecturer.

Vilely written and badly expressed as it was, there could be no manner of doubt as to the feeling that had prompted it. It ran, or—to be more correct—limped along in short disjointed periods; here and there occurred a wholly undecipherable word,—a certain amount seemed to be intentionally left to the imagination:—

"Men who deserved did not always win. Examiners as a class were idiots, Morris being a brilliant exception. Classics, of course, not in Morris's line. Pity just now it was so. He would have known. So much prejudice in favour of first-class men, often very inferior specimens, that Mr Loder would not risk rebuff at another college. St Hilary's knew a good man when they got him, though mistakes occasionally occurred. Had often thought himself of resigning fellowship and only keeping lectureship. Good opportunity now if Mr Loder would undertake to stand. A pity Ingram had not held on a bit longer."

By the time M'Gregor had mastered the contents of the letter, Dick, having left his window, was upsetting books right and left in search of 'Bradshaw.' Having at last found it, he turned over the pages rapidly, and presently announced that it would be quite simple to go first to Oxford and thence to London, there being a train to Oxford in an hour's time.

"And what the blazes do you want to go to Oxford for?" inquired M'Gregor.

"Why, to thank Lewis, of course. Oh, Tom, isn't it grand of him? What makes people so awfully kind?"

And he who a few hours ago had been in the very depths of

despondency was now overflowing with enthusiastic gratitude, until Tom M'Gregor, at all times sober-minded and matter-of-fact, brought him to his bearings.

"You will just stop where you are, Master Dick—at least you may go to London if you like, but I am not going to have you prancing off to Oxford and giving poor old Lewis fits. Of course it is a very fine offer of his, and, what is more, he means every word of it. So far so good, and you can say what you like to him—on paper. But the man is just like a snail, shyest beast in creation, and if you touch his horns—that is, go and fall on his neck and embrace him—you will just drive him back into his shell again and make him feel deuced uncomfortable, and do no good either. What you have got to do is to answer your wire, and say that you are going to London to see the other man, and then with a line to Lewis by post, and no bones will be broken."

This advice Dick wisely followed. What he wrote to Lewis is a matter of small consequence, but M'Gregor thought well to put in a few lines on his own account:—

"Dear Lewis,—You will be glad to hear that your letter brought a light into young L.'s eyes which I have not seen there for weeks past. Of course he could not accept your offer, but I doubt if he will ever forget it. Nor will yours truly, T. W. M'Gregor."

At five o'clock that afternoon Dick Loder rang the bell of Laurence Ferrier's house in the Cromwell Road, and was at once shown into the lawyer's study, and shortly put into possession of the reason for the imperative summons he had received.

"Fates and class-lists have been unkind, my dear fellow; isn't it about time for you to think of some other line of life that may offer a livelihood?"

"Well, I suppose I could get a mastership at a public school, only——" and Dick sighed as he remembered that this idea

had been put out of court by the Rector of Barksworth when they were discussing Dick's possible future.

"Only you don't happen to want such a post, eh?"

"I shouldn't mind it myself, but——" and again Dick hesitated.

Not to his most intimate friends, not to Tom M'Gregor or even to his brother, had he ever confided his hopes and fears on the subject of his matrimonial prospects. Now Laurence Ferrier, who knew a good deal more than his companion was likely to give him credit for knowing, regarding him with a kindly twinkle in his eye, prepared to invite closer confidence.

"'Only' and 'but' seem to point to other possible views, Dick. Perhaps there is some one else to consider?"

"Well, yes, there was," stammered Dick, "only——"

"Hulloa, old friend, 'only' again, eh? But we won't say 'was' at all, we will say 'is.' Come, let us suppose it's the Queen. Well, then, the Queen wouldn't like it?"

Dick simply nodded and smiled.

"Well, then, we must have something the Queen would like. Let me see, solicitor? Few years in an office, and then—oh!" as Dick shook his head, "I forgot. The Queen is an old lady, and might not want to wait so long We must try something else. Look here, my friend—how about a land agency?"

"But that would want time and other things," objected Dick.

"Come, let's analyse that. You've had no training that way, have you? No? A little, I think. You are not the sort of fellow to go about with your eyes shut. You would have good manners with the farmers. If I had an estate of my own I should rather like to have a young fellow like you for my agent. Pity I haven't an estate of my own, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid you would find me a pretty bad agent if you had," confessed Dick, laughing. Having now enjoyed the privileges of Laurence Ferrier's friendship for more than three

years, and knowing enough of the man to be sure that he had not brought him up to London to discuss impossibilities, he now felt some glimmerings of hope returning.

The next question took him rather by surprise.

"Is the Queen avaricious, Dick?"

"I don't know exactly what you mean."

"Well, it was the size of the kingdom I was thinking about. Some queens want large kingdoms, others are contented with very little. There was a pretty little mite came dancing along in a country village I was once staying at, a primitive little place where they retain old customs, and she called herself a queen, and your humble servant, having an eye for pretty faces and pretty manners, offered her the homage of his lips and gave her a shilling, with which she was mightily content. She was a May-queen, Dick. Now if yours had only been a May-queen, by good luck—eh—hey, what's the matter now?"

For here Dick, suddenly awake to the fact that the secret which he had so jealously guarded was no longer his own private property so far as the lawyer was concerned, had suddenly laid his hand upon the latter's sleeve.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed Ferrier. "It is a May-queen, then. *Rem*—what's the word? Oh! *rem acu tetigi.*"

"How did you know?" earnestly inquired Dick.

"There are little birds, there are walls with ears, there are people who talk in their sleep, there are young men who change from gay to grave, there are—hulloa! what a fellow you are to interrupt."

"Tell me, please," begged Dick, pulling at the sleeve he was still holding after the manner of a child enforcing a petition.

"My dear fellow," replied the lawyer, smiling, "if you will kindly leave go of my coat and answer me a question which I asked and to which you gave me no answer, and then one other question, I will satisfy your curiosity."

"Go on, please," and Dick took his hand off the other's sleeve.

"Is the Queen avaricious, and has she no kingdom of her own?"

"No, no," at once answered Dick. "No to both questions. Now tell me."

"My dear fellow, I now know the young lady's father, and he happened to tell me in the course of conversation that a young man had been—what shall I call it?—making love to his daughter and—well, yes, that the young lady did not seem to mind it much."

"And did he say?" began Dick eagerly, but the lawyer at once held up his finger and checked the inquiry.

"Don't ask any more questions. You and I must resolve ourselves into a Committee of Ways and Means. Look you here, young man: more than three years ago you told a man who had just knocked you into smithereens that you liked the process, and he promised himself then that a day should come when you should like it in reality. Now I like to go to the point straight. I take it that it is a matter of £ *s. d.*—now don't look frightened, I am not going to give it you, but I might be able to put you in the way of getting some of it. What's the figure?"

"Eight hundred a-year."

"And you have got?"

"Two hundred—at least I have nothing really of my own, but I had two hundred a-year from my father when I first went up to Oxford, and Graham has let me have it since my father died."

"Hem, well—don't you think we could manage to squeeze a bit more out of Graham, eh? I take it he is doing pretty well."

In a moment Dick was up in arms.

"I try to squeeze more out of Graham!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Why, he is giving me a good deal more than he has any right to afford as it is. You don't know Graham properly yet, Mr Ferrier, if you think that he wants to have money squeezed out of him. If I simply hinted that I could

do with more, he'd give it in a moment. But just look what his life is now! There he is slaving away in a beastly brewery, when he ought to be in the Guards, grudging himself every penny and grinding night and day so that he may be able to pay off the Jew who—oh, by Jove!" and the young orator pulled up abruptly as it suddenly occurred to him that it was one of Laurence Ferrier's clients who had advanced a considerable sum of money to pay off existing mortgages on Loders at an exceedingly moderate rate of interest, and another who had practically presented Graham with a directorship in the Brewery. And had he not now been speaking of the Brewery as "beastly" and Ferrier's other client as a Jew?

"I say, you know, I am most awfully sorry. I didn't mean to say all that."

"Never mind," said Ferrier, vastly amused at the young man's discomfiture. "We'll suppose that 'Jew' is the generic term for all money-lenders, as 'thief' is of lawyers. As long as you steer clear of both you will be all right. Indeed, you have already tasted the inexpediency of running up against a lawyer, on a bicycle at least. But come, I was only joking about your brother, so we'll try somewhere else. I have no property myself, but a client of mine is purchasing an estate in Norfolk, where we shall want a young agent, much of whose work will lie in supervising the gamekeepers and that sort of thing. They seem to consider the game more than the turnips in that part of the world, and my client will be more anxious for a strong head of game than a big rent, there being money from other sources to compensate for the loss of the latter. Now, how should you like to be an agent in that sort of position?"

"Could I really do it, Mr Ferrier, do you think?" exclaimed Dick. "You are most awfully kind to think of me, but your client?"

"I think you could do it or I should never have mentioned it. Queer thing too, if one comes to think of it, that an

Oxford scholar with a head full of philosophy should after all fall back on the *gumnastikè* in place of the *mousikè*—you see I have not forgotten my Plato. My client will take my recommendation, you may be sure. So now, Mr Richard Loder, am I to understand that you accept the offer?"

"Oh, Mr Ferrier, it's almost too good to be true. Accept it? Do you really mean it?"

"Why, you don't even know what the salary is," answered Ferrier, smiling at the other's enthusiasm. "However, I think we can run to four hundred a-year and a small house. Now?"

The long breath which Dick drew was expressive of gratitude, surprise, and delight in equal proportions. With his own two hundred a-year here was three-quarters of the required income ready to hand at the first bidding.

"By Jove, that's six hundred!" he exclaimed aloud.

"And a house," added Ferrier; "we may call that fifty. Six hundred and fifty, we will say, and possibilities. Now, if you will take my advice, Edwin—Dick, I mean—you will go straight off to-morrow morning and lay all these facts before Angelina, I mean the young lady's father."

The audacity of the proposal fairly staggered Dick for the moment, but Ferrier clinched the matter by telegraphing in his own name to Mr Balfour and warning him to expect a visit from Mr Loder at half-past eleven on the next morning.

"Now," he said, as soon as he had sent off the telegram, "you stand committed, young man; and, as Graham is coming to dine to-night, you had better tell him all about it. I quite commend your discretion in keeping your own counsel up to date, but I think now that you ought to take your brother into your confidence."

Graham Loder, being informed of his brother's wishes and prospects, as soon as the three men had the dining-room to themselves in the evening, played so strong a trump card that our young lover eventually went to bed in the seventh heaven of delight.

"My dear Dick," said he, having, after duly taking stock of the young man's appearance, decided that he must have been going through a very bad time of late, "I wish you had come to me earlier, as I could have spared you some anxiety. Of course you shall have your two hundred, but there is a little bit more that I put away for you in my own mind to start you in something when the time came. You remember my little nest-egg?" he went on, looking at Ferrier as he spoke; "well, it is five thousand and a bit to spare now. I think if we make it up to six, and propose to settle it right out on Miss Balfour, it would make up the amount Dick mentioned, and perhaps turn the scale in his favour. Of course," apologetically, "it is not much, and a few years hence I hope to be able to do more for them. But a settlement of a sort is a point, isn't it, Mr Ferrier?"

"So brother helps brother," replied Ferrier, smiling. "I like you two young fellows rather. You seem to live your own lives, and keep your own confidences apart, but when the test comes the bell rings true. Yes, Dick, the settlement your brother talks of is the thing to make your strongest point. Of course, you both leave out of consideration all count of what Balfour may be prepared to do for his daughter."

"Well, I really had not counted on anything. One never supposes that a clergyman's daughter is likely to have much. And besides, what she has would be her own, wouldn't it? I mean it would not count towards the eight hundred. It is awfully good of Graham to give me the chance of making a settlement, as you call it, but May has not got a brother to do the same for her."

"I daresay you will get along quite as well without brothers-in-law," said the lawyer drily. "They might not be all quite like—eh—Mr Graham Loder. And now let us join my wife. I am not going to let you sit up to all hours, friend Dick, if you're going courting to-morrow."

The last words that Graham said, as, an hour later, the two brothers parted on the doorstep, were—

"Good luck, old boy, and mind you make a point of that settlement," and then he went on his way rather sadly, as he reflected that three more weary years had to run before he could turn his thoughts to matrimony, a period which the money he had just given Dick might have shortened by a third.

CHAPTER XXV.

BARKSWORTH.

After his interview with Laurence Ferrier, the Rector of Barksworth had returned from London late in the evening and rather fatigued by his long day; and as he had not either on the night of his return, or at any time in the next day, shown any inclination to enlighten his daughter upon the object of his sudden journey, she had forborne to question him, and therefore for many hours remained in the state of one who is hoping for the best, yet nervous that the worst may befall her. This keeping the girl in anxious suspense was not an act of intentional unkindness on her father's part, but dictated by caution. Being himself of a somewhat nervous temperament, he was now being assailed by vague fears. That his daughter's thoughts were centred on the young man, Richard Loder, had become to him a matter of certainty; that the girl was content to accept that young man as guardian of her future happiness the Rector had no reasonable cause to doubt. But "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?" "Is thine heart right as my heart is with thy heart?"

Such were the thoughts which were haunting him. What positive evidence had he that time and absence had not made an alteration in the young man's feelings? His own private belief was that, as to Marian Balfour, there was only in all

the wide world the one man, Richard Loder, so too, to Richard Loder in his turn, the only woman in the wide world was Marian Balfour; and in favour of this presumption there were two distinct trains of indirect evidence from independent and reliable sources.

The Bursar of St Hilary's had stated that he had seen a marked change in Mr Loder's demeanour at the University in the past eighteen months; and Laurence Ferrier, whose judgment of mankind was seldom at fault, had pronounced Mr Loder to be a young man of his word as well as of charming manners.

And yet the Rector, weighing the pros and cons in his mind, had arrived at the conclusion that it was better to have his information on a very vital point straight from headquarters, and to hear from the lips of the young man, whom he had in his study sentenced to undergo a period of probation, a statement to the effect that he was yet of the same mind as he had been eighteen months ago. Yes, like Sir Henry Lee of Woodstock, the Rector would even study the young suitor's face, would convince himself by the evidence of his own eyes, and would in no case sacrifice his only child to one "who received not her hand as the greatest blessing earth had to bestow."

It was only for a moment, when, as he was dressing for dinner on the evening of the day after his journey from London, he received a telegram from Laurence Ferrier conveying the announcement that Mr Loder would be with him on the following morning, that Mr Balfour faltered in his resolution to say nothing to May until he had had a personal interview with the young lover. But before he went downstairs he had definitely made up his mind to keep his own counsel during the few hours that yet remained before Mr Loder's arrival, in order that there might not remain the slightest risk of the girl being eventually crushed by the last and most cruel of all disappointments.

It was with considerable astonishment that May, coming

downstairs on the third morning from that on which she had read the dire announcement in the 'Times,' found that her father was not only in the breakfast room before her, but had, for the first time since her arrival at the Rectory, been trespassing on her domains. Having made tea by the delightfully simple process of putting a good half breakfast-cupful of leaves into the pot and then turning on the tap of the urn, the Rector was quietly reading his letters, blissfully unconscious that the urn, having successfully filled the tea-pot, was now rapidly flooding the table.

"You are late, my dear," remarked the Rector as May entered the room.

"Late, my dear father, why, I am!—Oh!" Startled by the sudden exclamation, the Rector looked up, and, by way of mending matters, quickly snatched away the brimming teapot.

"My dear father," exclaimed May, as she ran forward and turned off the urn-tap, "what a truly manlike thing to do! Do look what a shocking mess you have made."

Mr Balfour looked: it was certainly rather bad, so he rang the bell for prayers, and returned to the original accusation.

"You were so very late this morning, my dear."

"Late, my dearest father? Look at the clock!" And as the hands of the clock were distinctly pointing at five minutes to nine, Mr Balfour proceeded to read prayers without further comment.

Prayers over, a servant restored order to the breakfast table, and father and daughter sat down, and shortly Mr Balfour began to manifest a wholly unusual curiosity into his daughter's movements for the morning.

"Do? what am I going to do? Why, very much as usual," answered May. "I daresay I shall read a little and practise a little and go into the garden part of the morning." The programme of amusement in a country parsonage on a sultry morning in July is not apt to lend itself to many variations.

"Oh, I thought you might be going for a walk, that is all;" and as Mr Balfour was extremely anxious for reasons of his own

that his daughter should be absent from the premises at a particular time in the morning, he presently suggested an object for a walk.

"I was wondering if you would be inclined to take a note up to your friend Mrs Stokes for me, May. There are some rabbits getting into the top part of the kitchen-garden and damaging things, and Stokes is clever in those matters."

"Well, I think I had better go in the evening, if you don't mind, my dear father. It will be or may be cool then. Now it looks simply boiling."

But inasmuch as to get May rather than the offending rabbits out of the way was the present object of the Rector's anxiety, he now proceeded to entrap May into a promise to start for her woodland walk at a quarter to eleven by offering himself as a companion.

Morning, he remarked, was so much the better time of day for a walk. He had always taken his training walks when he was May's age before midday, and felt much the better for it.

"But I am not in training," argued poor May, "and I don't think I shall feel at all the better for a walk in the sun."

However, the Rector carried his point, and having escorted May for somewhere about a third of her journey, suddenly and most basely deserted her on the plea that he had quite forgotten something that he ought to have done before he started.

In one way this was literally true, as immediately on his return to the house he sent a message to the cook to the effect that a gentleman was expected to luncheon. And having given orders that any one who arrived was to be shown straight to his study, he retired to that room himself and made a pretence of reading the morning paper.

As things turned out, the expected visitor arrived a full quarter of an hour earlier than the Rector expected him, Laurence Ferrier having telegraphed to Loders and instructed his groom, an old servant of the Loder family, to meet Mr Richard at the station and drive him to the Rectory at Barksworth.

"Well, Mr Loder," said the Rector, rising from his seat and

extending his hand to his visitor, "I am glad to see you. Sit down, will you?"

"I am afraid I have come before my time, sir," suggested Dick, rather diffidently, having the thought of the fixed period of two years in his mind.

"Oh dear no!" exclaimed the Rector, as he calculated that just at this time May might be at the keeper's cottage, or even about to commence her return journey.

"And I am afraid that I have not brought the first-class or the fellowship in my pocket," continued Dick.

"The merit, Mr Loder, in these matters lies not in the success itself but in the effort to achieve success. It was my good fortune to meet two days ago in the train a mutual friend of ours, Mr Loder, and I gathered from him that your comparative failure was rather a freak of fortune than of your own works or deserving. I was sorry to learn from him that you had been so unwell, and indeed, if you will allow me to say so, you hardly look fit for very much even yet."

The kindly reception, so very different to what Dick had pictured to himself in his own mind, was so distinctly encouraging that the young man plucked up courage to inquire who this most convenient and mutual friend might be.

"Your Bursar, my old friend Holmes. He and I had the pleasure of rowing—I beg your pardon, of getting our Blues at the same time. I may tell you that he spoke of your work, and of yourself, in fact, in very warm terms of praise."

That, then, was what the Bursar had been about, not writing —Dick had felt a little hurt at not hearing from him—but talking of him to the one man of all others whose good opinion was of vital importance. Now Dick's heart fairly leapt within him, and he felt that, if the Bursar had been present, he could have thrown his arms round his neck and hugged him then and there.

"How kind of him! how like him!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm, and, encouraged by the Rector's manner, he now plunged straight off *in medias res*,—poured into the willing

listener's ear the story of that gift of the gods, or rather of Laurence Ferrier, the Norfolk agency; of that benevolence of his brother Graham, the settlement of six thousand pounds, and, after the manner of young orators, broke off abruptly—to see the Rector smiling at him, smiling in very joy of heart, not at the brilliancy of the prospects, but at the certainty, now clearly read in the young enthusiast's face, that agency, settlement, and all else beside was as nothing to him if it might not be poured into May's lap. As Dick came to the sudden full stop, the Rector, finding himself called upon to say something, first hazarded the remark that it all sounded very satisfactory, and then went on to take each point in detail.

"Two-hundred a-year from your brother, if I followed you correctly?"

"Yes; it's very kind of him to give me so much when there is such a heavy mortgage on Loders that he cannot live there for years to come."

"Quite so," assented the Rector; "and the agency is——?"

"Four hundred and a small house. I thought we might count that at fifty. That was Mr Ferrier's doing. I hardly liked to undertake it at first, as I know so little of it, but he seemed to think it would be all right."

"If Laurence Ferrier thought it would be all right, I am perfectly satisfied, Mr Loder. His judgment is seldom at fault. And then there was something to be put in settlement."

"Yes, there is six thousand pounds. Perhaps it does not sound very much, but it is a lot for any brother to give as things stand. You know it would all belong to May even if I died—that is, you know, if you let me marry her," and Dick looked earnestly at the Rector, who had some difficulty now in keeping his countenance as he listened to Dick's lucid explanation of the nature of a settlement.

"Yes, I believe that money in settlement, if settled on the wife, does usually come to her after her husband's decease. But I trust that the occasion for thinking of that may not

arise for many a long year to come. I hope," in sudden alarm, lest some unforeseen objection might arise, "that there is no inherent delicacy in your family, Mr Loder. You are not looking very strong."

"Oh, I shall be all right in a week or two. I am really only run down a bit. I think I was worried over those Schools. But, oh! Mr Balfour, do you mean that I may really marry May?"

"In a very few weeks, Mr Loder, the power to say yes or no to that proposition will be beyond my province. My daughter will be twenty-one in the course of the next few weeks, and I believe at that age a young woman is allowed to speak for herself."

Dick hesitated for a moment before blurting out—

"Yes, but that would not be the same thing at all. I don't think May would say yes if you didn't, sir."

The Rector smiled approvingly.

"If my daughter is good enough to consult me on the subject, Mr Loder, I can only say that two friends in whose judgment I have every confidence have warmly recommended you to my favourable consideration, and that nothing you have said or done, so far as I am concerned, is out of harmony with their report. Perhaps in order that I may have an opportunity of making your better acquaintance you will give us the pleasure of your company here for the next day or two? Now are you satisfied?"

"I think you have been very, very good to me," replied Dick, very quietly.

Some twenty minutes later May, who had paid a rather lengthy visit to the keeper's wife, and had been listening with tingling ears to what was in that cottage an ofttold tale, the tale of Mr Dick Loder's many excellences, stopped rather timidly, as on her homeward journey turning the corner which led to the stile where she had once encountered Algernon Chevely, she became aware of a young man sitting upon the stile.

It was the young man's turn on this occasion to shade for a moment his eyes with his hands to convince himself of the identity of the young lady; and then as he bounded off the stile, and advanced with outstretched arms, May uttered one low cry of joy, and on the instant felt Dick Loder's strong arms encircle her, and heard Dick Loder's voice whispering loving greetings in her ear.

"I am so sorry, darling, that I've brought you neither the first nor the fellowship," observed the young man, as a few minutes later they sat side by side on the old stile.

"What do I care about the silly things now that I have got you! But," in sudden, "oh, Dick, have you seen my father?"

"He sent me to look for you, sweet one."

"Then bother the first-class and the fellowship too." And with these words the mountain that had been lying like a dead weight on Dick's soul for the last month resolved itself into a very ordinary molehill.

The Rector, after having started the day rather badly himself, found it necessary to recall the ideas of his prospective son-in-law to this matter-of-fact world in the course of the afternoon.

"By the way, young man," he suddenly exclaimed, "have you got any clothes but what you stand up in?"

"Good gracious! I left my portmanteau at the station."

"That is easily redeemed. But may I ask what your intentions were if you had not stopped here to-night?"

"Why, I was going back to Pangbourne, of course. Oh, I say, I must wire to Tom."

And that ill-used individual, who had been hourly expecting the return of his bantling, had his mind set at ease by the information that everything had come right, and that "*we*" were writing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BERTIE.

"It must be," said the preacher, "that there will come in to the life of every earnest man periods of grave doubt and anxiety,—times when, with two distinct and widely divergent paths of duty lying open before him, he comes to a standstill, and hesitates upon which to enter. There are those who tell us that his will prove in the end the wiser and the sounder choice who chooses that which is the less attractive to himself, that which is the most likely to be beset with thorns and difficulties. And yet, my friends, I would hardly like to go so far as to say this of my own responsibility. For in my journey through life I seem to have come across men, and women too, for whom the very words difficulty and danger would only act as loadstars, men who would rather take their lives in their hands and go straight into the jaws of death than reach the same goal by a less direct and perilous way; women who, in the spirit of self-sacrifice and self-devotion, undertake work that is manifestly beyond their power, and so pre-doomed to failure. Conscience, in many such cases, is a valuable guide, and yet even conscience is not infallible. The gravest errors have before now arisen from an excess of what we call conscientiousness. For there are times when it seems to me that conscience, in her anxiety to be just, errs on the side of self-severity.

"Justice, said the Greek philosopher, is that habit in respect of which the just man is said to apportion things, not so that he shall get more or too much, and his neighbour less or too little, of what is desirable, and conversely of what is disadvantageous, but so that each shall get his fair—that is, his proportionate share. We have no more right, then, to do an act of injustice to ourselves than to our neighbours. It is well to crucify the inordinate, to mortify the corrupt affections; but surely you and I, dear friends, are not called upon to exist in this world without any affections at all, far less is it desirable or even right to court voluntary martyrdom, whether of the mind or the body, where martyrdom is not required of us. The strong man's temptation too often is to overtax his strength, the brave his powers of resistance.

"Conscience then being a fallible, nay, even in some cases a blind guide, where are we to turn to for guidance? Hear again the wise words of the heathen philosopher—we need friends when we are young to keep us from error, when we get old to tend upon us and to carry out those plans which we have not strength to execute ourselves, and in the prime of life to help us in noble needs. And yet we may say that there are secrets so sacred that we shrink from laying our souls bare even to our most intimate friend. Must we fall back on ourselves then and our own conscience? As Christians, I say surely not. What does the Prayer Book tell us in the most solemn of all services? 'If there be any of you who by this means'—self-thought and self-examination, that is—'cannot quiet his own conscience, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him go to a minister of the Gospel and open his grief that he may receive counsel and advice to the quieting of his conscience and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.'"

Two minutes later the sermon concluded with the repetition of the text, "Keep innocency, and do the thing that is right, and that shall bring a man peace at the last."

To one listener sitting in Lord Leuchars' pew the concluding words sounded a mere figure of speech.

"I have tried," he thought sadly to himself—"I have tried to do the thing that is right, but where does the peace come in?"

It had seemed to poor little storm-tossed Bertie Treherne that, in almost every word of the sermon, the Rector of Barksworth had been making a personal appeal to himself. He had listened with an intentness with which he had never in the course of his whole life listened to any sermon before, and Betty Lisle, watching his set face, and having already gathered that something was out of tune with one of her dearest friends, had been feeling infinitely sorry for him.

The Rector was not one of those preachers who either call in the aid of rhetorical devices or emphasise their words by excessive gesticulation. His carefully prepared sermons were delivered in a clear, convincing, and rather metallic voice, and he seldom turned his eyes either to the right or to the left, but looked straight in front of him. And so now it had seemed to the unhappy Bertie, who was sitting under him for the first time, that Mr Balfour's gaze was centred upon himself, and that his innermost thoughts were being laid bare to the view of that scrutinising eye.

Bertie had come down, an ever-welcome if on this occasion a self invited guest, to spend the two or three remaining days of his leave at the Mote, sorely troubled in spirit, and with the hope that he might find the courage to take his kind host into his confidence and obtain counsel and assistance.

Only three days ago he had awoke one fine morning in his brother's house to find himself standing upon the very brink of a precipice, tottering to a fall that would involve the most direful consequences. For the fact had suddenly dawned upon him that he was hopelessly and madly in love with his dearest friend's *fiancée*, Miss Elsie Lauder. In this matter the boy had been the victim of a most untoward chain of circumstances. In the first place, he had been balked of a thing that he had set his heart upon, volunteering for special service in South Africa. It had been hinted to him from an influen-

tial quarter that there was a very strong probability of his services being accepted, and it was not until he was on the very point of sending in his application that he discovered that the brother and sister-in-law, the pair who since his father's death had been all-in-all to him, were living in daily and hourly dread of his doing the very thing which he had proposed to himself the pleasure of doing. To the childless couple, Jack Treherne and his wife, the young half-brother had grown inexpressibly dear, and they had lavished upon him all the fondness that under other circumstances might have been lavished upon an only child. There had been nothing that they grudged him. Even now, when they saw that his heart was set upon volunteering, they were preparing themselves to let him go without a murmur or a word of remonstrance.

But the quiet look of despair which came across Jack's face when Bertie mooted the subject had gone straight to the boy's heart.

"You don't like it, Jack?"

"One does not like having a tooth pulled out exactly, my dear boy, especially if it happens to be one's solitary grinder. But go you must if you want to. And Sara and I will do our best to comfort each other in your absence."

And Bertie, reconsidering the position, had chosen what was for him the harder of two paths of duty, and had given up the idea.

In the second place, it was distinctly unfortunate, as matters had fallen out, that Bertie, going to spend his leave at Holmwood while still keenly suffering from the effects of disappointment, should have found in Elsie Lauder, who was staying there, a sweet and sympathetic companion of his own age. The girl was in mourning for her father. There were times when even in that kindly household she was oppressed by the inevitable sense of loneliness; her natural protector, Tom M'Gregor, who had only ventured to come forward and declare his love when he found that the thought of his granddaughter's future was weighing upon Sir Henry Lauder's

mind, was detained at first by his anxieties on behalf of Dick Loder and later by his mother's serious illness. All these circumstances tended to make Elsie ready and willing to avail herself of Bertie's well-intentioned efforts to forget his own disappointment by putting his companionship at the girl's service, and to render her day by day more and more dependent upon that companionship.

"I am so glad you have got Bertie with you. He is the very best little fellow in the world and the most delightful companion."

So wrote Tom M'Gregor, happily unsuspicious of the possible complications that might arise from the intimacy which his words practically recommended. And so those two young people went on walking and talking with each other, like two children playing away quite happily with edged tools, playing so innocently that older and wiser people watching suspected nothing, falling into love so unconsciously that it came upon them in the light of a discovery that they had stepped beyond the line which separates friendship from the warmer feeling.

Too late, says the old proverb, to lock the stable door when the steed has been stolen; too late to recall the endearing epithet when the tongue has once spoken; too late to withdraw the foot that has once trespassed within the mystic circle of enchanted love when the print of the foot is once impressed upon the damp soil.

Never too late, though, to make the brave attempt to redeem the past, never too late to make the firm resolution to avoid being led into further temptation. On the very instant that Bertie almost unconsciously addressed Elsie Lauder as "my darling," and, starting as the word slipped from unaccustomed lips, fancied that he read in her face the true tale that the expression was not unpleasing to her, he felt that he would like the earth to open asunder beneath his feet and swallow him up. What was Korah's sin after all in comparison with his sin? The Israelite had murmured against a fellow-Israelite

of whose ascendancy he was jealous; but he, Bertie Treherne, had been trying to gain that which belonged to his friend, to make himself master of that which was nearest and dearest to Tom M'Gregor.

"Elsie," he exclaimed, "I am sorry. We must forget all this. You and I must learn to forget each other."

"Yes," she assented, loyally determined to second the efforts of the boy to keep them both straight in the right way.

"It must be as if it had never happened. And then we need not tell dear old Tom. I am not going to have Tom made unhappy."

"And yourself?" she whispered, looking wistfully at the bright face clouded by a shadow of pain.

"That doesn't matter. And you, Elsie?"

"That doesn't matter either. Nothing matters," she sighed.

"It would matter if we brought trouble into his life."

"Yes, perhaps that would matter."

"It has been all my fault," said Bertie, after a momentary silence. "Now I must go away, and we must forget each other."

"It is hard upon you. It was my fault as much as yours. I think I saw it coming; I ought to have stopped you."

"Never mind now. If we keep straight now it will be as if it had never happened. I'll be off by the first train to-morrow, and in the years to come you and I will laugh over it together. Now I'm off to find Jack."

But before looking for his brother, Bertie despatched a telegram to the Mote, prepaying a reply—then he marched into his brother's room.

"Jack, old fellow, I am all unsettled somehow. I can't quite make up my mind if I did right in that South Africa matter after all. I think I ought to have gone perhaps; anyhow, I think I should like to go and talk to Lord Leuchars about it."

"Do whatever you think right, my dear boy," sighed Jack. "I thought you had got it off your mind; but if you haven't,

by all means go and talk to Leuchars. He is much more likely to be a good adviser than I am in this case. And anyhow we need not worry Sara one way or the other till it is settled."

For the rest of the day Bertie carefully avoided anything approaching to a *tête-à-tête* with Elsie, and as a sultry and thundery afternoon was sufficiently oppressive to account for a headache, the young lady rather wisely kept her room and retired to bed early in the evening, and only came down to breakfast in the morning as Bertie was on the point of starting to catch his train.

"Good-bye and good-luck to you, Miss Elsie, and mind you give my love to Tom when he comes." This was said in the presence of the household, and the poor girl, interpreting the cheery farewell into a warning that she was henceforth to banish the recollection of the new and return to her allegiance with the old lover, with humble and contrite heart resolved to assay that almost impossible task.

Little, it may be imagined, had Bertie slept on his last night at Holmwood. His heart was being rent asunder by conflicting emotions; his brain, nervously active, now absorbed in vain regrets for the past, now evolving plans for the future.

How suddenly the storm had burst upon him! What a weak fool he had been not to exercise more self-control! If he had so done, and kept a guard upon his tongue, how easily he might have slipped away quietly and no one but himself would have been any the wiser, and on his head only the punishment would have fallen. Elsie! Did Else mind much? Would Elsie mind much? Did it go as hard with a girl in a case like this as with a man? He hoped not. Poor little Elsie! And Tom M'Gregor too! Thank goodness, Tom need never know anything about it. Out of sight would be out of mind with the girl, at least he prayed that it might be so. It was a bit rough upon all parties that he, Bertie Treherne, should seem to have been selected by Providence to hurt the

man whom he loved best of all men outside his own family, and the girl he loved better than life itself.

Why had he not been allowed to go to South Africa without any fuss?

But what was the good of crying over spilt milk? The milk was indeed badly spilt, and it was he who had upset the jug.

Now for the future. Could he simply go back to the old routine life in England as if nothing had happened, and live on in the hope that the regiment might be ordered to go to Africa, when he would have to go with it as a matter of course? No, that was impossible. It would be unfair to Elsie. The two might run up against each other at the corner of any street, and he felt sure that if it was with Elsie as it was with himself, chance meetings for weeks, months, years to come would be downright agony. What then? Was it possible to get off to Africa at once? Well, yes. Lord Leuchars had great interest at the War Office, and might be able to work the oracle for him. But even then Jack and Sara had to be considered. It had been such a relief to them when he had not gone before. Would it be very selfish of him to go now simply because he was afraid of himself—afraid lest, having made a fool and a beast of himself once, he might be tempted to do the same again? And yet Elsie!

He would put the matter before Lord Leuchars—not tell him of course exactly what had happened, but put it rather as a sort of society problem, and be guided by his advice.

Reaching the Mote on Saturday, a day on which Lord Leuchars' time was taken up by county business, Bertie had had no opportunity of taking his host into his confidence up to the time that he went to church on the Sunday morning and heard Mr Balfour, as it seemed to his fancy, personally addressing him.

"I like your parson, Betty," he suddenly exclaimed as the pair walked home across the fields after church. "There was a lot of stuff in that sermon."

"So you seemed to think," replied Betty, who could be grave or gay as occasion required, and who having quite made up her mind that Bertie was strangely unlike himself, was anxious to get at the root of the malady.

"What sort of a man is he really, Betty?" now inquired Bertie, rather nervously. "I mean, is he the sort of man who would be awfully down on a fellow and rub him up the wrong way?"

Betty considered her answer for a minute, discerning from Bertie's manner that there was a purpose in the question.

"Dick, Dick Loder, you know, who is going to marry his daughter," Bertie nodded as she looked at him; "well, Dick says that he is very nice and kind, and if a man is nice and kind to the man who is going to carry off his only daughter, he is probably nice to other people. Of course, May says there is no one like him, but if he was not nice to May he would be a pig."

"I've a very good mind to ask him something then, Betty," presently observed Bertie, with the feeling that with Betty's assistance he might be able to get at Mr Balfour. "How and when do you think I could catch him? Don't ask a lot of questions, there is a dear girl, but tell me what I want."

"I'm not blind, Bertie, and of course I can see that you are all wrong somehow. If—no, though, I am not to ask questions. If you really want to see Mr Balfour, he is coming up to tea this afternoon. The service is in the evening, and they are all away at the Rectory. And, what is more, it will have to be to-day or never, as he only comes up from the seaside from Saturday to Monday. You shall have a chance of a quiet talk with him if I have to lock my mother up in the drawing room. My father won't worry and fuss, of course, but —may I ask one question, Bertie?"

"Ask away."

"Why didn't you speak to my father, if there is anything wrong? He is very fond of you, and oh! so kind and so gentle."

They had walked on quite a quarter of a mile before Bertie had quite made up his mind whether to accept or reject the friendly suggestion. On the subject of Lord Leuchars' kindness he had no manner of doubt, but he was nervous in his own mind whether he might not for ever and for aye forfeit the good opinion which he so much valued. Conscience, as Mr Balfour had said in the course of his sermon, was erring on the side of self-severity.

Fortunately Betty's good sense came to the rescue. The man had muttered something to the effect that he "hardly liked to tell Lord Leuchars, that it was too——" when the girl turned round and, stopping in the path, faced him.

"What nonsense, Bertie! If any one but yourself hinted that you had done anything mean or disgraceful, anything that a gentleman would be ashamed of, I should tell whoever it was straight out that it was untrue. I know you too well, you silly boy—you are worrying yourself about some trifle, and I am not going to let you worry. You put yourself in my father's hands, and let him hand you on to Mr Balfour if he likes. But I am sure that you ought to go to the man who has known you all your life first, and not to this stranger."

For a man who is halting between two opinions, the presence of a friendly adviser who will make up his mind for him is a veritable godsend.

Bertie hesitated no longer, but, following Lord Leuchars into his study after lunch, put him into possession of the principal facts of the case.

"My poor boy," said Lord Leuchars kindly, as Bertie came to the end of his story, "you have made what we call a *faux pas*, but you have done nothing to be ashamed of after all. You have acted as I should expect my dear friend Jack Treherne's brother to act. You went trespassing by accident, and you came back of your own accord. Human nature is human nature after all, my dear boy, and it is the nature of a lad of your age to be attracted by a pretty face. But you committed no sin of intention against your friend, and you

at once tore yourself out of the reach of temptation. Now as I like to talk of these things in the abstract for everybody's sake, it is your fear, is it not, that the moth, if it remains too much in the vicinity of the candle, might be attracted to singe its poor little wings again and not do the candle much good either, eh?"

"Well, yes," replied Bertie with a faint smile,—"that is, if they happened to be brought very closely together. I mean they would be safer apart."

"Very well then. Listen to what I propose. I don't feel that I should pronounce a strictly impartial opinion on the matter of this South African scheme, for the simple reason that I know dear friends of mine who could ill spare you. Put it before my good Rector: he is a kind man, and a wise man, and a foreseeing man, and you may take my word for it that he would keep your secret as closely as I shall. Then if you come to me and tell me that he favours the South African scheme, I will see what I can do for you at the War Office."

Two hours later Mr Balfour arrived at the Mote, and was met at the door by Lord Leuchars, who had been on the look-out for him.

"Come into my study for a few minutes, will you, Mr Balfour?" and his lordship led the way and motioned his visitor to a seat. "Now," he continued, "I am going to ask a favour of you. I have a young friend staying in my house who is anxious to take the advice which you gave us in your very excellent sermon this morning. In fact, he wishes to consult you on a matter of conscience. There are certain reasons why I decline to advise him myself, but I am quite prepared to assist him to carry out any suggestion you may offer. I will ask you to advise him as I would ask you to advise my own son, Mr Balfour. He is very precious to us."

The depth of feeling displayed by Bertie during the course of a half-hour's conversation, his evident dejection and contrition, the anxiety displayed to take on to his own shoulders

the whole burden of punishment as well as of guilt, to excuse the girl of any share in the past error, to shield her from the possibility of any complication in the future, the chivalrous devotion to the friend whom he had wronged, made a strong impression upon the Rector. So far from judging the young man as severely as he had judged himself, Mr Balfour found himself tempted not merely to condone the original offence, but to wonder whether it might not be possible to approach the young lady's recognised lover with a view to rearranging matters on a more satisfactory basis. There was something, he argued to himself, so peculiarly attractive about the young man, who had brought his difficulties to him, that it was next door to an impossibility for the girl, however honest her intentions, to go back to the old lover exactly as if nothing had happened. And if the friend was a man of the type that Bertie had described him to be, surely then he would be the last man in the world, who, if his eyes were opened, would exact the sacrifice that these two young creatures were ready to make—the last man in the world who deserved to receive in all innocence as complete what could only be a half-hearted offering of trust and affection.

"The danger, Mr Treherne," he said gravely, "is that the last error may be worse than the first—that the young lady, having once begun to institute comparisons, may——"

"Comparisons between myself and Tom M'Gregor, Mr Balfour! Oh!" and having said so much Bertie stopped short, colouring painfully. No names had hitherto been mentioned, and now his tongue had for the second time run riot and betrayed a jealously guarded secret.

"Let it be as if it had not been said, Mr Treherne," said the Rector, pitying his distress; "I quite appreciate your feelings. Now you will promise me one thing, and that is this. If I say to you, Carry out your resolve and go to Africa, will you, can you go in the proper spirit, soberly and earnestly resolved to do your duty like the gallant young soldier that I feel that you are, taking all reasonable pre-

caution, and never recklessly exposing a life which you know to be precious in the eyes of many; giving your services to your country as is her due, yet not with the thought that your country has the only claim upon you? How could I ever reconcile it to my conscience, Mr Treherne, if I felt that I had sent you to your grave? Now think a minute before you give me that promise."

"I promise, and — thank you," said Bertie after a short pause, holding out his hand.

"Then go in peace, my dear boy, and come again in peace. And remember that others as well as myself will be often thinking of you and praying for you."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE RECTORY GARDEN.

Dick Loder's marriage had been finally fixed to take place in the last week of October. There had been certain reasons in favour of the slight delay. In the first place, Mr Balfour, having arranged his holiday for August, had naturally wished to have May with him; and then, as the young lady was to arrive at the age of twenty-one in the latter end of September, it had been agreed upon between the two high contracting parties that she should enjoy one month of what Laurence Ferrier was pleased to call complete emancipation.

"Quite right that she should have a mind of her own for a month," said the lawyer, laughing; "it is a pity to be a chattel all one's life. You have been an infant, that is your father's chattel, up to date, my dear, and you will be Dick's chattel from the day that you are married."

"I shall be Dick's wife, of course."

"But me no buts. A wife is a chattel if she knows her proper place. Ask Gertie."

No one objected to this arrangement, not even Dick himself. The Rector, he felt, had been very kind to him, and, since the day on which he had given his assent to the marriage, had raised no difficulties of any kind soever. Dick therefore was anxious to be equally considerate to the Rector, and after all, if marriage was a great thing to look forward to, the engage-

ment was very pleasant while it lasted. There was no reason why any restrictions should be put upon the young lovers' intercourse, and they enjoyed the waiting time intensely. Mr Balfour showed a very accommodating disposition to be either absorbed in thought or to be looking in another direction on fit and proper occasions; Laurence Ferrier and his good little wife alternately teased and petted the young couple; there had been a delicious period of rambling along the seashore in August, of listening to the evening song of the birds in the woods near Barksworth, of paying a visit to the keeper's cottage and receiving the warm felicitations of the worthy fellow and his wife, of being coaxed up to the Mote by Betty and there turned loose to amuse themselves after their own liking.

"Betty, you are too sweet to both of us!" protested May, as they parted from her one day at the Mote gates.

"You keep your flatteries for Dick, my dear, and don't spoil him too much either, if you take my advice;" and with that the girl kissed May, and then walked back to the house rather sadly, not jealous of their happiness, but wondering why fortune, niggard to the elder, should thus smile on the younger brother.

Two or three times had Dick meanwhile suggested to Laurence Ferrier that it might be as well if he were to run down to Norfolk and make some preparations for entering upon his new duties, but on each occasion the suggestion had been met with a kindly but decided negative.

"Just you make hay while the sun shines, my young friend. Things are not in train down there yet, so that it is no use your going. Everything shall be ready for you by the time you come back from your honeymoon, and you shall come and stay with us to do your furnishing. Go off and enjoy yourself, and get some colour in your face and some flesh on your bones. You had a hardish time of it, my boy, and I tell you that you want a long rest before you get into harness."

"How awfully good you are to me!"

"Oh! you like it, do you? Get out of my office, and go and play with your kitten."

And in all their happy days not for one moment had either boy or girl ever been assailed by a doubt as to the wisdom of their choice. Each passing day and hour seemed to bring more perfect happiness.

It was a little disappointing to Dick that he should have to practically lose sight of his mistress for the few days preceding and following her birthday. Jack Treherne had sent him a roundabout invitation, through Tom M'Gregor, to go to Holmwood for some partridge-shooting, and the date had unfortunately clashed with May's little coming of age festivities.

"Of course, I shan't go," he exclaimed, as he read the letter.

"Of course, sir, you shall go," retorted May. "I foresee already that I shall be unpopular enough among your men friends after we are married. For goodness' sake don't make them all hate me beforehand. I really do hope you will go, dear," she went on more seriously, "it will be so very nice for you; and as in any case I shall be in London for ten days' shopping, you would not see very much of me. My father has promised to come up for two days, so that I shall not be feeling lonesome."

So Dick ran off to Holmwood, where he thoroughly enjoyed himself, eliciting warm approbation from Jack Treherne on the subject of his shooting.

"It's good of you to come, Dick," remarked Tom M'Gregor, on the day after his arrival. "They are all down in the dumps a bit about Bertie having gone out to Africa, and my poor little Elsie is still fretting after her father."

At the end of his visit Dick travelled back to Westhampton to avail himself of Lord Leuchars' kind invitation to consider that house as his home for the time that remained before his marriage, and found a letter from Laurence Ferrier awaiting his arrival, asking him to try and make it convenient to

run up to London for a night to talk over some business arrangements.

"I will expect you on Thursday, if I don't hear to the contrary; and as Graham has to go to Loders on that night, he can go and act as your deputy with May if you like."

Dick wired off an acceptance, and on the following morning started to pay his respects to his lady-love at the Rectory. And he had not been five minutes in her company when he noticed a certain constraint in her manner. They were sitting in a little summer-house in a remote corner of the Rectory garden, and May, instead of talking on in her usual way, seemed to be absorbed in the not very interesting occupation of drilling small holes in the floor with the point of her parasol.

"Are you knockod up by your shopping, darling?" he inquired, when after the first greeting the girl made no attempt to open conversation.

"No," she said, "not tired exactly, but I've been thinking."

"Thinking of what, sweet May?"

"Lots of things—that you might have done better for yourself than to marry a country parson's daughter, for instance."

"Not when she is all the world to me," was the answer.

"And she is all the world to you, is she?" and looking at Dick's face the girl seemed to be satisfied with the expression that she saw there, and now abruptly branched off on to another subject. "Dick, dear, do you like your in-law to be?"

"My in-law to be? What do you mean, dearest?"

"Why, my father, of course. He will be your in-law sometime soon, won't he?"

"Of course I like him and shall always like him. He gave me my May-queen."

"A great gift truly," and she smiled. "And I suppose, dear, that my in-law gave my Dick to me. We couldn't have married if Graham had not helped us, could we?"

"Not a chance of it," answered Dick, shaking his head—"not a ghost of a chance if the dear old fellow hadn't come forward."

"I wish the dear old fellow, as you call him, would come forward a little more," observed May, so disconsolately that Dick could only gaze at her in astonishment. "Not that way, you dear silly boy. I am not quite so avaricious as all that. But it seems to me that I hardly know your brother by sight. Of course I have been introduced to him, as he came to dinner in London one night, and I am not sure that he did not make a pretty speech of a sort, but after that I never got the chance of speaking to him. It's so stupid not knowing one's relations."

"I didn't know you minded so much, May dear."

"Men don't mind, perhaps," and the girl spoke pettishly; "they are not carried off from their homes and introduced to a lot of strangers whether they will or no. I don't think it is nice of Graham at all never to have been near me."

"Oh dear, what is to be done?" exclaimed Dick, not a little taken aback at this sudden attack upon his brother. "Look here, May, he is going to sleep for a night at Loders; let me see when. Why, to-morrow. I shall tell him to come and call on you before he starts back on Friday."

"Won't he bless you?" laughed May, her apparent fit of discontentment vanishing in a moment. She was tired, as it seemed, of digging at the floor with her parasol, and was now building a pyramid of coins upon the little rustic table.

"Hulloa! you've been to Whiteley," remarked the man who was watching her.

"Why?"

"Because you have got so many farthings."

"Wrong for once, sir; I have not been near Whiteley's. But it's a lot of money, isn't it?"

"A lot, indeed; why, it is," counting it, "a whole shilling and sevenpence three farthings."

"Oh dear! I wish it was more," sighed May, "but there, her face was her fortune, you know. You may have it if you like, Dick dear," and she pushed the little heap of coins towards him.

"I don't want your money, my May," he said, puzzled by the girl's manner.

May laughed.

"You won't get another chance of having it, sir, unless you take it now. Suppose I spent it all before we were married, what would you say then?"

"Well, it's yours, darling."

"And you promise that you will not stand over me with a big stick and shake it at me and say, What do you mean by being so extravagant, you horrid little thing? Promise, Dick."

And poor Dick had to give the promise, not without exacting some compensation in the way of kissing the little hand that now covered the coins.

"Now as a punishment for that I shall just give it all away," and in a moment May jumped up from her seat and called to a grubby little boy who was weeding in the garden, "Come here at once, Joe;" and when the astonished youth appeared, wiping his hands on his trousers as the simplest method of getting rid of the clinging dirt, she thus addressed him,—

"You have been a very good boy, Joe, and you weed very nicely, and so Mr Loder and I are going to make you a present. There!" she crammed the coins into his hand, "now say thank you to Mr Loder, and don't spend it all on sweets."

"But I had nothing to do with it, you funny girl," exclaimed Dick when the boy, having gone through the prescribed ceremony, had returned to his occupation.

"If I wished it to be a joint-present, it was a joint-present, and it's very horrid of you to say that it wasn't. And now come in and have lunch, and mind you tell Graham to be nice to me."

So saying, the girl led the way to the house, and Dick obediently followed her.

Whether the fact that his future sister-in-law had imperiously demanded that he should call upon her, with the view of making her better acquaintance, entirely commended itself to Graham Loder's liking is a matter of some doubt. But when in obedi-

ence to Dick's earnest note of entreaty he did take the trouble to walk down to the Rectory on a morning so hot that it ought to have been July rather than October, and, finding the young lady busy in that feminine form of gardening which consists of cutting off dead leaves and stalks and leaving them on the path, was called upon to act as a beast of burden, at the end of the first ten minutes he was inclined positively to detest her. She was what he termed in his own mind masterful, inquisitive, and frivolous in turns, the inquisitiveness and the frivolity being more actively objectionable than the determination to have her own way, so characteristic of an only and a badly spoilt child.

"I didn't come all this way to carry your rubbish about," said the young man to himself; and then it occurred to him to wonder what he had come for exactly, and to institute very invidious comparisons between this girl who was keeping him trotting about in the sun and that other girl only two miles off for a sight of whom his heart was hungering, in whose service he would gladly be content to fetch and to carry till the end of the chapter.

"Look!" said May suddenly, stopping in the middle of the path and pointing with her finger. Graham looked and saw—an enormous snail, now comfortably coiled up in its shell on the stalk of a tall hollyhock, upon whose leaves it had left visible token of its presence and powers of devastation.

"Pick the creature off, there's a dear man," was the next order. "Oh!" May gave a little shriek as Graham, having most unwillingly pulled off the snail, which he handled delicately as he might have handled a wasp, prepared to despatch it in the usual manner. "Don't kill it: carry it, please." Then she marched to the wall at the end of the path. "Now, throw it over, please," and, looking at Graham, she thus apostrophised the snail—"Go and eat cabbages instead of flowers, you greedy thing. It's a long lane that has no turning, isn't it, Mr Graham?"

The transition from the snail to the man came so abruptly

that Graham started to see those blue eyes, which his brother raved about, sharply watching him.

"I suppose so," he said, "but won't it do just as much harm there, and—eh—ought not you to call me Graham?"

The question of propriety May calmly ignored, but the matter-of-fact way in which she said that the owner of the neighbouring garden was a Dissenter who deserved to have his cabbages eaten provoked a smile from his companion.

"I like old proverbs and old nursery rhymes," remarked the girl as they turned back, and then it pleased her to display her more frivolous side. "I'll show you what we used to do at our school. 'I love my love with an A,'" she chanted in a low sweet voice, "'and his name was Arthur, and I fed him on apples and ale'—oh, dear," breaking off short in her chant, "how very unwholesome. Now it's your turn; go on, please."

"Go on? What do you want me to do? I don't understand."

"When did a man ever understand?" this with an imperious stamp of her foot. "Go on after me. 'I love my love with an A.'"

"I love my love with an A."

"How stupid you are, I have done that already; go on with the next letter."

"I love my love with a B," muttered the man, "and her name was Bertha, and I fed her on beans and beer."

"Oh, what a nasty combination!" exclaimed May, "but I don't care a bit, if her name was really Bertha. You can poison her for all I care. Now, if it had been Betty."

Again Graham felt rather than saw that the blue eyes were watching him, and found himself wondering whether this very inconvenient and inquisitive young lady had drawn a bow at a venture or was really trying to probe the secrets of his heart. And so wondering he held his tongue.

"I wish it had been Betty. I love Betty so dearly myself—Betty Lisle, that is; she is a dear."

May waited as if for a corroboration of this proposition, but receiving none, asked a question.

"Don't you think Betty ought to make a very good match some day? Of course she won't have much money, poor girl, poor"—she dwelt on the word—"poor, but making many rich. Oh, dear," sighing, "where does that come from? But how rich dear Betty will make some man some day—so rich that he will never remember that he once was poor. Don't you wish, Graham, that Betty had a brother?"

"Why?"

"Because, perhaps, even if he was a poor man himself, even if it kept him waiting for his own happiness, he would put it into her power to marry the man she loves as well as I love my Dick."

There was a suspicious break in the girl's voice as she finished speaking, and, the scales falling from Graham's eyes, he looked up to see neither malicious elf nor mischievous fairy, but a sweetly pretty girl with flushed face and quivering lips, half abashed by her own temerity, trying to find words to express her gratitude.

It was fully an hour before Graham could tear himself away from the society of this young lady of many parts, who talked to him so sweetly of his own lady-love's many virtues, of another girl who, loving her Dick dearly, would never feel completely happy till Dick's brother's waiting days were past, who hoped that Graham would keep a little corner in his heart for herself and regard her as a sister indeed. That their intimacy made rapid strides might be gathered from the parting words,—

"Good-bye, you dear little witch. How you know I know not, but I am so glad that you do know."

"I know because I am a little witch, of course, or a sibyl if you like. Look up, Graham, don't you see a silver lining to the dark cloud?"

For a second time within an hour the words seemed to strike a familiar chord in Graham's memory, and he puzzled

himself all the way to London in trying to remember how, when, and where some one besides May had used the same proverb.

"The most bewitching little sister you could have picked for me in the wide world, my dear Dick," he wrote off to his brother as soon as he got back to his rooms,—"as good as she is pretty, and that means a lot."

And on the following morning, as Laurence Ferrier was leisurely walking downstairs to breakfast, there came a ring at the front-door bell, a second knock, and then another ring.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed the lawyer, and with that he walked to the door and opened it himself, to find Graham Loder standing on the doorstep, pale and breathless.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Come to breakfast, eh? What's the matter with you, my dear fellow? Come inside."

"Surely this is a hoax," exclaimed Graham as he mechanically obeyed the invitation, at the same time thrusting a letter into the lawyer's hand.

"Come in here," said Laurence, leading the way to his study. "Hoax? Well," as he took in the contents of the letter, "I only wish some one would play me the same kind of hoax once a-week. No, no, Childs' Bank does not lend itself very easily to a hoax of this sort. Come, come, I'll give you ninety-nine thousand for it on the spot; at least —eh—hem—I'll find a client who will."

"But do you mean, really and sincerely, that some one has made me a present of a hundred thousand pounds?"

"I am as certain of it as that I am standing here—hulloa, what's up? the fellow is going to faint."

For Graham had staggered wildly, and only saved himself from falling by clutching hold of the nearest chair.

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said the lawyer kindly; "sit down and pull yourself together. You have played the man in the downs of life, and now the up turn has come."

For five minutes or more Graham with his head buried

in his hands tried to collect his senses, to assure himself that he was really Graham Loder awake, clothed and in his right mind.

"No one knows all that this means to me," he said at last.

"There is one here who guesses, my dear fellow, and another perhaps somewhere who has hoped that the gift might bring happiness."

On Betty Lisle's ears, as she was walking in her rose-garden that afternoon, there fell the sound of a rapid footstep. And before the girl, startled by the unexpected sound, had had time to wonder whether she had heard, or only fancied that she heard, an arm was thrown round her waist, and the voice she loved the sound of best in all the world had whispered in her ear,—

"Betty, I have come and Loders is clear."

And she, who had waited patiently for the coming of her king as she had called him, now without doubt or questioning rested her head upon his shoulder.

"At last, my love," she sighed; "oh! but the days have been so long without you."

If Lord Leuchars, coming as was his wont to call his daughter in to tea—for he was very tender to the girl in those days—paused for a moment and rubbed his eyes in sheer astonishment to find her talking to a young man in her rose garden, no sooner had he convinced himself of the young man's identity than he laughed in the very joy of his heart.

"What, Graham! What good wind brings you here?"

"A good wind, indeed; Loders is free and Betty has promised to be its mistress, if her father will consent."

"Loders is free, is it? Then see that you make a worthy *châtelaine*, my child. There is only one man in the world to whom I could give you with all my heart. Here, take her and make the best of her, my boy, and," rather hurriedly, "don't for goodness' sake quarrel with her mother more than you can help."

On the whole it will be admitted that Lady Leuchars resigned herself to the situation rather gracefully.

"I think, Betty," she was pleased to remark after Graham had gone off back to London, "that brewing has agreed with that young man. He is better-looking than he was, and he tells me that every penny will be cleared off the estate."

"Perhaps that makes him appear better-looking, mother."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WEDDING-BELLS—JOHN MARTIN.

It is a curious thing, curious but true, that whenever a parson either gets on his legs to make a speech, or sits down to write a letter or a story, people should not only always expect a sermon, but even be disappointed if a sermon does not come. "Ne sutor ultra crepidam"—stick to your last, friend cobbler; to your vocation, friend parson, they seem to say; do not trespass amongst the trivialities of life; talk to us of serious matters, and we will fold our arms in the good old style and either slumber or listen to you at our pleasure. But it must be preaching, mind; we do not expect everyday or society talk from a parson.

I am not by any means an orthodox type of parson myself, not at least in this matter of sermonising when I wish to write or speak of matters mundane. I am a poor preacher at the best of times; a poor preacher, I repeat, and—woe is me!—often a poorer practiser.

But I can keep a promise even when made in jest or in the enthusiasm of gratitude; and as that young Dick Loder vowed that, in return for his winning our grand cricket-match, I had promised to come and marry him, I kept my word: I came, I saw, I was conquered—conquered by the sweetness and charms of a young lady with the loveliest blue eyes and the loveliest flaxen hair that ever I did clap eyes upon. And that young

lady now may call herself Mrs Dick Loder, having been by me united in the bonds of holy matrimony with the very best cricketer who ever honoured our village-green with his presence. It was in no sense a grand nor a largely attended wedding, and under the circumstances it was curious that no less than four Oxonians of more or less my own standing were present besides myself—Dick Holmes, once of Trinity; Lisle, now Lord Leuchars; and Laurence Ferrier from Christ Church—the House, as the boys now call it; Balfour of Corpus, who once stroked the Eight, and might, if he wished it, have won any fellowship that was going. And I had some knowledge of all four men, with Holmes being of course intimate, having often met Balfour in Holmes's rooms, and being on speaking terms with the two Christ Church men, who commonly hunted in couples. How old we all look, to be sure, Tritons of age among all these young minnows! Half-way between the Tritons and the minnows there was at the wedding Lewis of Hilary's—probably he had some other College to start with—who, being a very great mathematician, is beyond words uncouth, and being beyond words uncouth, has every claim to be a great mathematician. What a contrast the man is to Laurence Ferrier, the Sphinx, as some men at Oxford used to call him, but a Sphinx, mark you, of courtly manner, of ready wit, of kindly heart, whom those who knew him best swore by, and those who knew him less well respected at a distance.

Well, we had done with the marrying, I myself acting as chief officiator, and Balfour, the bride's father, only assisting. I may call it a most unemotional ceremony, unless you are pleased to call radiant faces and soft smiles evidence of emotion. The chief bridesmaid might have challenged the bride herself in respect of beauty, an Ellen Douglas or an Isabelle of Croye supporting Rowena the Saxon.

I know that I am out of date myself, and that is perhaps the reason why I was glad, if I had to be at a wedding at all, to find myself once again confronted by the good old-fashioned wedding-breakfast—not wholesome, I grant you, for men like

Dick Holmes and myself, but invented in the days when an iron race had never heard of indigestion. I sat next to Holmes in a position where we commanded a good view of the bride as well as of the attendant beauty, who sat on the bridegroom's left hand.

And when we had eaten and drunken, Balfour of Corpus stood up, and I could see that each man and each woman of the party prepared himself or herself to listen to a sermon, with but one exception—for the bride kept her eyes firmly fixed upon her plate, and I seemed to myself to fancy that she was trembling. And then at the moment that all due arrangements had been made for the reception of a sermon, when Laurence Ferrier, sitting back in his chair, had folded his arms on his chest and fixed his eyes upon the ceiling as though preparing to count the flies, Balfour, a man of fact rather than of imagination, in his calm quiet way told us what sounded like a fairy tale.

"My Lady Leuchars, Lord Leuchars, ladies and gentlemen, you, who have honoured my daughter and my son-in-law with your presence here to-day, have a claim to know a few facts which I will shortly lay before you. Twenty-two years ago there died intestate in the north of England one Andrew M'Farlane, a man of great wealth. He died, as I said, intestate, and left no immediate heirs. It was brought before my notice by a friend here to-day that my dear wife was in all probability among those distant heirs for whom the Court of Chancery was advertising. I do not know that of ourselves we should ever have thought of prosecuting a claim to the money of a man with whom we had not even a passing acquaintance. We had enough to live upon in the way that we wished to live, and I am no believer in the theory that increased wealth will bring in its train increased happiness. But our friend was inclined to think otherwise: he urged upon us the fact that we had no right to allow the children who might come after us to grow up in comparative poverty through our refusal to avail ourselves of those claims of inheritance which the laws of the land

might recognise. He offered to take all the necessary steps to prosecute our claim, and in the very week that my dearly-loved wife died I was informed that the Court had awarded to her, as heiress in a third part, the sum of two hundred thousand pounds. Again, with my grief fresh upon me, I might well have forgotten the whole matter. I had lost earth's choicest blessing, the love and the sweet companionship of the wife of my heart."

As the speaker's voice trembled for a moment, there was the first sign of emotion in the room. Two or three of the ladies sobbed audibly, and though I hardly hazarded a glance in her direction, I could see that the pretty bride had frequent recourse to her handkerchief. Even Dick Holmes cleared his throat loudly, and I felt myself that, had I been called upon to speak, my voice must have been husky. But the thing that struck me most was the look of absolute bewilderment that came over the face of the bridegroom's elder brother, who had played the part of best man full manfully. First of all he glanced at the bride, and instantly withdrew his eyes when he saw that she was crying; and then I saw him lean forward and look down the table in the direction of Laurence Ferrier, who, having now counted the flies, had closed his eyes and might almost have been supposed to be asleep.

"But again my friend interfered. 'You must think of your child,' he said. The money in the eye of the law is hers. If you do not care to touch it, it must be stored for her future use. And so I yielded on the condition that he who loved my child from her cradle upwards, my dear friend and my dead wife's dear friend Laurence Ferrier, should undertake the charge of my little one's worldly wealth; and under his wise and prudent stewardship the capital sum has been considerably more than doubled."

Here Holmes created rather a welcome diversion in a way peculiar to himself, and having said what he had to say quite loud enough for two or three people near us to hear him, got very red in the face and hastily swallowed a glass of

champagne. Lord Leuchars, after two or three painfully suppressed gurgles, wisely crammed his handkerchief into his mouth and there retained it; the faintest flicker of a smile passing across his face proved that Ferrier was, in spite of his appearance, wide-awake to what was going on around him. Lewis, who had been carefully following the figures, and could, I have no doubt, have told us the exact sum to which two hundred thousand pounds ought at a reasonable rate of compound interest to have amounted to at the end of twenty-one years, upset a wine-glass; the smallest and plainest of the bridesmaids, who had been sobbing two minutes before, henceforward giggled at intervals.

"It was my most earnest wish—and here Ferrier and myself were wholly at one—that my child should grow up unhampered by the knowledge of her own wealth, free from the perils and temptations likely to surround a child known to be a great heiress. We wished her to be loved for herself rather than for the accidental gift of fortune—to be wooed and won as the clergyman's daughter, not as a merchant princess. The result of our policy has amply satisfied us. I am sure that in my young friend Mr Richard Loder my daughter has married the man of her heart, one who will faithfully and conscientiously divide with her the heavy responsibility of wealth. If we thought it right that my daughter should have a short breathing-time between the day of coming into possession of her fortune and her marriage, I am inclined to believe that her husband will not be unreasonably displeased at a step indirectly sanctioned by himself, whereby the happiness of other friends with every claim upon them both has by the ready co-operation of my fellow-trustee been, we believe, ensured."

Here another diversion arose; for that lovely bridesmaid, whom I have before alluded to, having up to this stage of the proceedings conducted herself with most laudable propriety, on that instant rose from her seat, and warmly kissing the bride, whispered to her, not so low that I failed to hear,

"I always said that you were my good angel," and with that burst into tears and abruptly left the room. It seemed natural that the best man should at once start in pursuit. And he too had a word to say to the sweet bride, which brought a rosy flush of pleasure to her cheek; and he added, moreover, a hearty hand-grip to the bridegroom, who, previously more disconcerted than entranced by his brilliant prospects, now beamed with delight. It came to my knowledge later that when in this spring Lady Betty Loder was presented on her marriage by her mother, opinions were divided as to which was the fairer thing to look upon, the Lady Betty herself or the necklace of pearls that she wore—each pearl historical, each, as the saying goes, worth a knight's ransom, a wedding gift "from May and Dick in settlement."

"May I ask you to join me in drinking health and happiness to Mr and Mrs Richard Loder?"

Oh yes, we drank it, I promise you, and one of the party had the temerity to rise from his seat and in the presence of us all to kiss the bride as tenderly as he might have kissed his own daughter, and we others sat there and applauded and perhaps envied Lord Leuchars his privilege.

The other speeches—there were not many, to be sure—fell flat after this astounding revelation. It seemed to me that the bridegroom would have said more than the few faltering words of acknowledgment he did utter, had he been able to catch the eye of the man he was looking at as he spoke. But two or three flies had changed their position on the ceiling, and Laurence Ferrier evidently felt it his duty to recount them.

A sprightly young gentleman, a Master Allan Chetwynde, who usurped the functions of the best man, absent without leave, made some pleasant and airy remarks about the bridesmaids, in the course of which he gave evidence of such manifest readiness to commit bigamy, trigamy, or even quadrigamy on the spot, that I tremble for his future fate. I noticed that, in the course of his speech, the fair bride whom Master Chet-

wynde, with a lamentable confusion or ignorance of genders, had incidentally spoken of as "El Dorado," so far recovered her courage and composure as to steal sidelong glances at various members of the company, paying more special attention to Dick Holmes, who in no wise abashed took off his spectacles and wiped them prior to indulging in a prolonged inspection of Dick Loder's newest possession.

The moment that chairs began to move Holmes gripped me by the elbow.

"If I don't get a quiet smoke somewhere I shall be ill for a month after this orgie. I am going to get hold of Ferrier—he is sure to know the ropes;" and in five minutes Ferrier had escorted Holmes, Lewis, and myself to a sweet little summer-house in a far corner of the garden, where we felt ourselves secure from interruption.

"I guess this little hovel could tell some tales," muttered Holmes as he loaded his great pipe; "made for courting, I call it. Dear me," as he struck a light and puffed away contentedly, "this is a shade better than kissing indoors—isn't it, Lewis?"

Ferrier kindly provided me with a cigarette, and had just lighted one on his own account when he suddenly exclaimed, "Oh bother!" and on the word shoved his hands deep into his trousers' pockets. For there came the sound of men's voices approaching, and one of them was saying, "I'll lay my life he is here," and for the first time that day Laurence Ferrier was fairly cornered. It was the best man who tackled him first, in virtue of his right of primogeniture taking precedence of the bridegroom. We other three men might have been stocks or stones, so entirely was our presence ignored.

"Can I ever thank you enough? Will you ever let any one thank you?" began the young man in a low nervous voice. "What a blind fool I have been for these months past not to know that you were at the bottom of it all!"

"Nothing to do with me, my dear fellow. I am only a

man of business. It's my client you have got to thank, my client the—ah!—breweress and the other thing."

"And that agency," now struck in the other brother, looking Ferrier very straight in the face.

"You are quite welcome to be your own agent, my good fellow, if you like. There is nothing in the statute-book against it. Graham here would probably recommend you to employ a gentleman of the name of Beam, but I have unfortunately lost his address."

As Ferrier still kept his hands buried in his pockets, it was obviously impossible for either young man to damage his fingers in the way that it had been in their mind to.

"It's too bad of him, Mr Martin," said Dick, turning to me in despair. "He does everything in the world for us—picks us out of the gutter——"

"He did nothing of the sort, Martin," interrupted Ferrier. "I'll bring an action for defamation of character against you both if you don't hold your tongues. There were two girls after my own heart and two boys after my own heart, and I had the simple pleasure of bringing them together, and I," gravely, "can never be sufficiently thankful that accident gave me that power. Now may I go on with my cigarette in peace, please?" and so he dismissed them.

Then did Holmes, whose habit it is to grumble loudly when things are thoroughly to his liking, thus set a bad example to Lewis.

"Better have been lunching in the Common-room, Lewis; sentimentality is so d—d indigestible. Don't look shocked, old Martin; you are looking a bit yellow yourself. You'll be yellower still to-morrow; so will Lewis."

And Lewis, having been told that he was going to be yellow, opened his mouth for almost the first time that day—to speak, I mean, for he had eaten and drunk freely—and delivered a series of grumbling aphorisms.

"Marriages made in heaven. Pity they had to be made on earth too. Very unwholesome process. Getting up at seven

o'clock in the morning to catch a train. Upset for the day. Very fond of Loder. Very lucky man. Lucky girl too. Might have been married without all this fuss. Why had he come? Why had Holmes come? Why?"

It was at this moment that I noticed a quiet smile come over Ferrier's face, and following the direction of his eyes, I looked and behold—the bride! In all her beauty, in all her finery, she stood there looking at us.

Poor Lewis! *Vox faucibus hæsit.* Yellow forsooth! I never saw a man turn red all over more suddenly as we others instinctively doffed our hats in acknowledgment of that queen of beauty's presence. He, poor mortal, was far too much taken aback to know whether his hat was on his head or his head even on his shoulders.

And then with an indescribable grace of manner she advanced and held out her hand to him.

"May I answer your question, Mr Lewis? I know you are Mr Lewis because Dick told me so at breakfast. It was because a very selfish but indeed a very grateful girl would not have felt her cup of happiness full to-day if she had not been able to see her husband's kindest friends round him, if she had not been able to tell them with her own lips how truly he and she value all their goodness to him. It was a sweetly pretty inkstand that you sent my husband, Mr Lewis, and we shall always prize it as having come from you. But oh! that letter you wrote him, that," and here she lowered her voice yet more, "I shall keep and read to him, if ever the dark days come again."

Poor Lewis, as he listened to her gracious words, could only gulp and look all nohow. Again I say *vox faucibus hæsit.*

Not so old Dick Holmes. For he, when with sweet grace and shy words of gratitude she put her soft hand into his huge paw, half stooping, raised it to his lips and thus answered her—

"He is a good lad, my dear, and till to-day I thought that you were a lucky young lady to win a heart like that. But if

you were as poor as Lazarus I should call the boy a spoilt child of fortune to-day. Hum—yes, indeed," and he drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose loudly by way of fortifying the assertion.

"I wanted you all," she said in a minute or two; "we are going to have a photograph, and I am going to ask you two gentlemen to stand behind Dick and support him as you always have done. You know, I suppose, why Mr M'Gregor and Miss Lauder cannot be here. Oh dear," as she gathered that we were yet in the dark, "they are with the Trehernes, and the news only came two days ago that Mr Bertie Treherne is missing. It is so sad for them all, and it is so much better that that kind Mr M'Gregor should stop with them."

"And pray where do I come in?" inquired Ferrier as we moved in the direction of the fast gathering group.

"Need you ask? Where you have always been since I was in my cradle. With my dear father supporting your ward who would have her own way."

As soon as the first group had been taken, the two young Loders insisted on another,—Laurence Ferrier and those two whom he was wont in jest to call his foster-daughters.

"What are we going to pose as?" he kept on asking, though obviously pleased at the compliment paid him,—"Satyr and attendant nymphs? Two Beauties and a Beast, or what?"

"The best fellow I ever knew in my life, and the two prettiest girls of my acquaintance, though I say it who shouldn't," answered Lord Leuchars; and a moment later, as the group was being taken, he added in an undertone to Mrs Ferrier, "and I am not sure that Laurence isn't the best looking of the three."

And indeed, as I looked at them, the noble face of the man who stood with one arm round each of those lovely girls' waists reminded me of the face of Apelles in the great picture.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISSING.

Missing! perhaps lying wounded and half-starved on the veldt; dead perhaps, whether buried or unburied; a prisoner on the way to Pretoria, there to be treated like a common convict, mocked, insulted.

What nameless horrors, what hideous possibilities, what agonising doubts and uncertainties were suggested by that word "missing"!

There had come to Holmwood one cheery letter from Bertie to say that he had reached Capetown, and was starting up-country on the next day,—then a period of silence; and a fortnight ago had flashed across the seas the fatal announcement that Lieutenant Bertram Treherne, Coldstreams, was missing, and since that there had been no news.

What wonder then that, in the shortening days at Holmwood, the Squire wore a grey look on his face; that Mrs Treherne moved about the house softly, an image of silent despair; that Tom M'Gregor, trying to speak words of comfort where there was no comfort, lay awake at nights and groaned as he saw daylight approaching, and felt that the time was coming to get up and go downstairs and resume the same old weary task of trying to keep up the spirits of three disconsolate and heart-broken people.

In a way most of all to be pitied was the girl upon whose

conscience it was lying like a dull weight that she was personally responsible for the boy having gone to South Africa,—that the agony and suffering which her host and hostess were enduring might have been spared to them if she had never set foot inside the grounds of Holmwood. To whom was she with her heavy burden of remorse and desolation to turn for relief?

At one moment she was tempted to throw herself upon Tom M'Gregor's mercy, to tell him all, and ask him to forgive her, and allow her to go and hide her wretched head in some sisterhood, where she might busy herself in good works in the hope of redeeming her fault and of erasing from her mind the recollection of the cruel punishment it had brought on herself guilty and others innocent. Nor was it a selfish fear that checked the impulse. One man, the poor girl said to herself, had already gone to his death for her sake, and she shrank from inflicting deadly pain upon the other—that other who had been Bertie's friend, to whom Bertie had sent his last message by her lips; the man who by her father's dying bed had told her that he loved her, who, since her father's death, had, so far as in him lay, anticipated her every wish.

At another time would come to Elsie the thought of taking her sympathetic hostess into her confidence. Yet what good was to be gained by that? Even that most gentle of women, Mrs Treherne, could never again have the same feeling for a girl who had allowed herself to drift into loving one man at a time when her heart was professedly in the keeping of another,—a girl who had in her weakness allowed the new lover to go off to the wars, leaving all that was nearest and dearest behind him, and the old lover to come back to her side unsuspicious and unsuspecting.

It was a cruel misfortune for the girl that her old and faithful friend, Miss Firchild, had been called away two days after Bertie's departure to nurse a widowed and invalid sister. In the absence of outside support she had to fall back upon her own resources, and finally at much cost to herself she had mapped out for herself this course of duty—to stay with the

Trehernes till cruel doubt had changed into more cruel certainty, and then in course of time to carry out her engagement with Tom M'Gregor; to give to him, not her fresh young love, but her obedience, her care, and so far as it might be her sympathy; to try to be the faithful, the amiable, though she could never be—in the proper sense of the word—the loving wife of the man whom Bertie Treherne had loved like a brother.

"I can never be happy again myself," she argued, "but as well be miserable that way as any other so long as I can make him happy."

On the side of good fortune, if any fortune could be good, she accounted it that there was little opportunity and little inclination for love-making in the present, when two other heart-broken people demanded constant companionship and constant sympathy.

There was yet another person sorely ill at ease in those days, the Rector of Barksworth. The joy of his daughter's happy letters and the greater joy of an occasional sight of her happy face was sadly marred by the thought of that young man whom he had sent away from England very sorrowful, and whom he had read of in the papers as missing.

And yet—so absolute a confidence had the Rector that Providence ordereth all things for the best, that hope never entirely deserted him. Constantly repeated short visits to London, which the healthy state of his parish allowed, and which Laurence Ferrier ascribed to the natural feeling of loneliness consequent on his daughter's marriage, were dictated by the circumstance that an old college friend filled a post of some responsibility at the War Office.

Everything comes, they say, to him that waiteth, and to that expectant watcher came a day when, having stopped a night with the Ferriers, he drove to the War Office to make inquiries on his way to catch an early morning train.

"No news at all," was the answer to the usual inquiry, and Mr Balfour's foot was already on the step of his hansom, when a messenger came flying down the stairs of the War Office with

the request that he would wait for a few minutes. Glancing at his watch to find that in all probability he must, if he waited, miss his train, he dismissed his cab and followed the messenger into an ante-room. A full quarter of an hour elapsed before he received a summons to go upstairs, and even then he found his friend's room empty. Another delay for a few minutes, and, as the door opened and the clerk came in with a paper in his hands, Mr Balfour felt that he was trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Good morning, Balfour; news of your man at last,—good news, too. Heavens, man! how white you look. Have something?"

"The news, please, nothing else."

"Here it is then—'Treherne, Coldstreams, previously reported missing, invalided home'—there, that is official. A private wire is still more satisfactory. The young fellow was missing for two days only, found his way back to camp with a flesh wound through the arm and another through the leg; touch of enteric; much better, almost well, in fact, when they reached St Vincent's; conduct had been most gallant. He ought to be home in four days. That's all, I think. Now, are you satisfied?"

"It's quite certain?"

"Quite certain; in fact, I am going to telegraph to his people now. I can't understand why these mistakes occur, but they do occur in a big—eh—system."

"Don't telegraph; let me take the message. I will catch the first train. There are reasons why a personal message would be better."

"It's very good of you," said the official, hesitating. "Upon my honour, I am not sure yours is not the better plan, if you don't really mind the trouble. Joy never kills, they say; but still, if you think it better, you shall take the message. Look out a train in Bradshaw, will you, while I just put it in some form."

Jack Treherne at Holmwood had been making a miserable

attempt to keep conversation moving in the sad little party which was sitting down to lunch at Holmwood, when the butler brought in a card which he presented to Mr Martin.

"'Rev. Lionel Balfour, Barksworth Rectory,' who knows the gentleman? Where is he, Richards? Hang it, the name is familiar somehow."

"I've shown him into your room, sir."

"Why, it is Dick Loder's father-in-law."

Tom M'Gregor and the butler spoke almost simultaneously. There was a shade of disappointment in the Squire's voice as he said—

"Ah, that accounts for it; found himself in the neighbourhood and wants some lunch. Have another plate laid, Richards, next to Mr M'Gregor there, and I will fetch him in."

Joy never kills!

What is the meaning then of that strange cry in the Hall? Why is it that Jack Treherne, accounted the straightest walking man in the country-side, staggers blindly into the room, and there for the first time leaving his hold on Mr Balfour's sleeve, looks wildly round for a moment, and then, carrying his joy straight to where he had carried his sorrows and his joys for many years, clasps his wife in his arms and almost overwhelms her with kisses? Why does Tom M'Gregor leap up from his chair with a loud hurra, which—for the butler has caught the news—is shortly echoed in the servants' hall, in the gardens, in the stables, in every homestead on the estate?

"Bertie safe and will soon be home," and on the word Elsie Lauder swoons away, and is only saved by Mr Balfour's ready arms from falling on the floor.

Tenderly Tom M'Gregor carries her to her room, and there leaving her under the care of Mrs Treherne and her maid, returns to the dining-room to find the Squire plying Mr Balfour with every hospitable offer that occurs to him, and protesting that bringing the good news home is the kindest and most thoughtful thing he has ever heard of in his life.

"I had had the pleasure of making Mr Bertie's acquaintance," explains Mr Balfour, speaking to the Squire, but with his eyes upon M'Gregor, to whom he has not yet been introduced.

"Oh, by Jove, I forgot," exclaimed the Squire; "let me introduce you to our friend Tom M'Gregor, Mr Balfour. He is as fond of Bertie as any of us are—indeed, if it could be, fonder."

"And I have met people who are very fond of Mr M'Gregor—my young son-in-law, for instance, who has told me not a little of Mr M'Gregor's kindness, and my old curate Ridley, who is never weary of singing Mr M'Gregor's praises. Men who are good friends themselves, Mr M'Gregor, are seldom found to be wanting in good friends."

And all this time the thought that was uppermost in Mr Balfour's mind was—"This man has a good face, and a kind face, and the face of a strong man; but how will he bear the thing that I must tell him?"

Yes, he must tell him all, or the last error might be worse than the first.

The opportunity came at last, and Mr Balfour was not slow to avail himself of it. He had finished a hurried lunch, and, pulling out his watch, declared that he must start to walk back to the station.

"Oh, but we will send you, if you really must go," exclaimed Treherne.

"I would really rather walk," was the answer. "I was going to ask if some one could put me on my way to the station. They said something there about a short cut," and he looked at Tom M'Gregor as he spoke.

"I'll come with you, Mr Balfour," said Tom, rightly interpreting the look. "You and I have so many friends to talk about, and I am sure you must want to get rid of all outsiders just now, Treherne. You and your wife have so much to talk about."

"Yes, and to be thankful for," assented the Squire; and

having walked with the other two men to the end of the garden, he there took leave of the Rector, after repeating his warm thanks for his kindness in coming.

For a few hundred yards Tom and the Rector talked about the Loders, the Ridleys, and other indifferent subjects, and all the time the latter's mind was occupied with the difficulty of finding out a method of introducing a more delicate subject of conversation. Pitying the man from the very bottom of his heart, he felt that the other man, who was coming back from his self-imposed exile, wafted as it were by the contrary winds of fate, and the girl who must be driven almost to despair by her conflicting emotions, were objects for pity too.

"I have an errand with thee, O captain." The words which he had read aloud in church not so very long ago would keep thrusting themselves on his memory now. In the end he said something much to the same purpose.

"At the risk of appearing to be very impertinent, Mr M'Gregor, may I say a few words to you about yourself and another person? Is there any place where we could sit down for a minute?"

"Nothing can be impertinent that is kindly meant," answered Tom, smiling. "There is an old cowshed there. Let you and I be the cows for the present." The cowshed in question turned out to be a fairly clean building; that it was rather dark Mr Balfour felt more glad than otherwise.

"It is not easy to say exactly what I want to say, Mr M'Gregor. May I put it in the form of an allegory?"

"By all means, though I won't promise that I shall be able to translate it."

"Not many weeks ago, then, a young man came to a priest in deep distress. He had a burden upon his conscience, and he had brought that burden whither our Prayer Book advises the Christian to bring it. Incidentally he had come across a priceless gem—a gem which belonged, as he knew, to a man he loved well. The young man saw the gem lying before him in

all its beauty, and though he knew that it might shiver in his grasp, that—so delicate was its nature—the slightest touch from any hand but that of the owner might mar its perfect beauty, he was young and heedless, the temptation was too strong within him, and with the tip of his little finger he softly touched it. There was no thought of harm or of robbery in his heart, but so fair to see it was, so attractive to his young eyes, that softly, as I have said, almost unconsciously, he touched. And on the moment he felt that he had erred, and feared that he had marred the exceeding excellence of the gem. And a horror fell upon him, the horror of a man who felt that he had been guilty of disloyalty to the owner of the gem, that he had taken from the beauty of that which his friend so prized. There was no dallying with temptation, no self-condonement of the offence he had committed, only a feeling of bitter remorse, only the hope that the full beauty of the gem might yet return to it, only the prayer that the owner of the gem might never know that the touch of another's hand had profaned it. Straight to the priest he went and laid bare his soul before him, and showed that he was ready himself to suffer any punishment if only the gem might be restored to its beauty. Should he go on a crusade from which he might or might not return——"

"But he has returned, thank Heaven!" interrupted Tom M'Gregor, "and in his absence the man you have called the owner of the gem, which was indeed a woman's heart, had noticed that some one had touched it. But there was no defilement in the touch. The gem has only become more beautiful than before, for it is shining now with the lustre of a girl's self-sacrifice, of a boy's loyalty to his friend. It had never really belonged to the man you called the owner; he had only dreamt that it was his. But yet it was exceedingly precious and beautiful in his eyes, and he was afraid to let it pass out of his sight till he could hand it over to the boy it belonged to; so he waited and watched and hoped for the boy's return, that he might restore to him the precious jewel

which was really his to have and to hold, to prize, to love, and to cherish, as he himself, had it been his own, would have prized, loved, and cherished it."

For some minutes the only sound that broke the absolute stillness of the lonely hovel was that of the hard breathing of two strong men, each labouring under strong emotion.

At last Mr Balfour spoke.

"I could hardly have ventured to hope that my story would have had the ending you have given it, Mr M'Gregor; and yet I would say that I ought to have hoped—it is on a piece with things which I have heard from others. I have often thought that one of the bravest things I ever heard in my life was what happened in a story which my friend Ridley told me, a story of a man who sat by his friend's side waiting for what looked like certain death in a fire. But of the two, I feel this is the harder thing to face."

He paused for a moment, but as the other man did not speak, he asked the question—

"But what of the owner of the gem—of the man, that is, who was the owner, and, as I on my conscience believe, would be the owner at this moment if the—the gem had been lying in this place to-day? What of him?"

The answer came presently in the form of another question.

"Should I make a respectable missionary, Mr Balfour?"

"If a brave heart and an unselfish spirit are, as they must be, attributes of the missionary, I might say 'none better.' And yet, Mr M'Gregor, I would ask you whether such a thought ever occurred to you till quite lately—whether you are not now tempted to offer, to the highest life of all, that which costs you nothing? For if so, I say that you have no right to enter such a service with that feeling—the feeling, I mean, that life has no attraction to offer you. And I would bid you think of others too, of that boy and girl to whom, at what I know is an awful cost, you offer a happiness that you had pictured to yourself. If their happiness could be happiness at all when you left them with the thought that they had wrecked your

life, I tell you that the gem we spoke of just now was not worth the picking up."

"And I should tell you that you were slandering the sweetest woman," exclaimed Tom with sudden savagery; then he stopped quite suddenly. "Oh dear, what am I saying? I was rude and ungrateful. I am sorry," and he held out his hand to the other man. "I didn't know what I was saying quite. But I see that I can't be a missionary, Mr Balfour."

Still holding the hand which he had readily grasped, the Rector spoke a few parting words of comfort.

"In one sense of the word you will be a missionary whether you will or no, my dear fellow. England has need of strong men like yourself to supplement the work of her clergy, to set to their weaker brothers the example of a pure and unselfish life. I will not believe that here at home you will not find work come to your hands, for you are not one of those who sit with their hands folded and watch the evil that goes on around us. You have shown to your friends, not only in this case, as I know, a love that passes the love of woman; and upon my honour, Mr M'Gregor, when this pang is past you will, or you ought to be, the happiest man I know."

The next three days passed like a dream to Elsie Lauder. She kept her room for the rest of the day following her fainting fit, and early on the succeeding morning received a message from Tom M'Gregor to the effect that he was starting for Southampton with the Squire, there to await the arrival of Bertie's ship. The absence of her lover gave her what, under all the circumstances, was a welcome breathing-time in which to form her plans. But it was difficult to settle her mind to thought. If the news of Bertie's safety had banished one cause of grave anxiety, the knowledge that he was coming home aroused fresh perplexity. How would they meet, as meet they soon must, in a spot which for them abounded with tender recollections? Could she, could Bertie, so nerve themselves as to greet each other like friends who had parted on merely ordinary terms of friendship?

Yes, she hoped and she prayed that the requisite strength might come to those in sore need of it,—strength to drift apart, to live their lives apart, and to do their duty in those divided paths of life along which fate had ordained that they should wander. At least, if apart, Bertie and herself would still be working in unison to bring about for a friend very dear to them both a happiness which could never be their own. Vague and imperfect as that plan might be, it was the best that the girl could evolve for herself, but it was well for that poor little troubled heart that a clearer brain and a stronger nature was arranging her future for her. Three days later came a telegram from the Squire to the effect that Bertie had arrived in Southampton, and that they might be expected on the following evening; and on the morning, when Elsie, with trembling heart and shaking limbs, was trying to nerve herself to face the most formidable ordeal of her life, a letter from Tom M'Gregor was brought to her room by Mrs Treherne's maid. It had been enclosed in a letter to Mrs Treherne herself, and was simply directed "For Elsie."

"Dear Elsie,—I am sending Bertie back to you to-morrow for you to nurse and to love and to keep with you always. You two young things might have known that I could never consent to stand between you and your happiness. Both of you are much too dear to me. You have nothing, either of you, to reproach yourselves with. It has all been a mistake—my mistake, from start to finish. I ought never to have told you that I cared for you at a time when you were thinking so much of your father and of his anxiety for your future. I meant it for the best, but it has been cruelly hard on yourself and Bertie. I have explained it all to him, and have made it all right with Jack and his wife, who will welcome you as a dear little sister. Thank you very much for so patiently trying to care for me. One thing I am doing, which you let me do for auld lang syne — that is, making up your little fortune to

£500 a-year. It is so much better that a girl should not be wholly dependent on her husband, even when that husband is Bertie Treherne. I should like to have done more, but they won't let me.

"Good-bye, Elsie dear; be happy yourself and make Bertie happy too.—Yours affectionately, TOM."

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

They were sitting in Daisy Ingram's room at Elmscroft, talking of Bertie Treherne's marriage, which had taken place in the preceding week.

"How did the child look?" asked the man.

"Sweetly pretty, but a little grave, I thought," answered Daisy.

"And Bertie?"

"Very well, quite himself again. He tried to talk to me about you, but—he broke down."

"Poor Bertie, he was always a tender-hearted little fellow. Well, I hope they will be happy."

Presently he shivered.

"I hope you've not caught cold," and Daisy looked at his face rather anxiously.

"No, I think not,—not body-cold that is, but somehow one feels cold, out in the cold at least. It is like that game we used to play when we were children, a sort of puss-in-the-corner, or chairs they called it. One child was always standing alone. There wasn't a corner vacant, or a chair, or something, and it felt odd."

Daisy went on stitching busily. She could not trust herself to speak, and at last a great tear dropped upon her embroidery, and then another. Stealing a hurried glance at the man,

she felt thankful that he had not noticed it. He had picked up a book, and was turning over the pages, not reading it certainly, only turning over the pages vaguely, now and again allowing his eyes to dwell upon a sentence or a word. He looked so much dejected, there was so worn and haggard an expression on his face, that the woman's heart went out to him. Furtively wiping her eyes, she went on with her work mechanically, bracing herself up all the time to try and talk to him calmly and dispassionately.

"Is it quite right," she said at last, in a soft low voice, "to say or to fancy that there are no corners left for you? Don't you know that there is a corner in my heart, yes, and in my dear husband's heart, that no one but yourself could ever fill? Don't you know," gathering energy as she spoke, "that that girl would have dragged herself on her bare knees to your feet when she got your letter, to beg you, to implore you, to take her back again; yes, and Bertie would not have held out his finger to stop her. Oh, you men, you men, if we can't give you that one thing that you ask for, must it always mean that there is no corner in our hearts for you—that you are left out in the cold?"

He looked at her with widely opened eyes. He had known her for some years now, had been infinitely sorry for her once, had rejoiced in his own heart that her sorrow had at last been turned into joy. But she had never before taken him to task like this.

"Perhaps not in the cold altogether," he admitted with some reluctance.

"Listen," she said, "you took me to be your sister once. I have never forgotten that day, never forgotten all your goodness and your gentleness to me. Listen, and your sister will tell her brother a story that she has never told any man or any woman either before. No, don't look at me; keep looking the other way, please. I couldn't bear you to look at me while I speak."

"Don't tell me, if it hurts you, Daisy," he pleaded.

"It may do you good to hear it, only don't look at me, please. When you came—no, before you came, when the news came to Oxford that night I thought it would kill me: I could not see how I could possibly live without George. I slept—most girls would not have slept, I know; but I really think that I sent myself to sleep with the hope that I should never wake, that I should go on sleeping like these people at Ephesus, and that I should see George in my dreams somehow. But in the morning to my horror I awoke, and I cannot tell you how miserable I felt. It was as if my life was a great black cloud, and I must go on walking through it, never coming to the end. It was on that morning that you came to me and were so kind, so kind that I can never forget it, and yet you shocked me, in a way, most horribly all the same. You seemed to take things in a grave, matter-of-fact sort of way, to think that I could ever be to another man what I had once hoped to be to George, that any other man could ever be to me what I had once hoped George would have been."

The tears were falling fast now, a sufficient excuse for the request that the man would not look at her. But still she struggled on bravely with her self-imposed task.

"My only comfort used to be—for weeks and for months the one thing that seemed to prevent me from growing cold and hard and cornerless, as you call it, was the reading the letter he had written to me, and the knowledge that in all those awful and trying days his thoughts had been for me only, and never for himself. Were we better off, think you, than you are now? I had lost him for this life, lost him knowing that he had felt for weeks past the pang of impending separation, and that he had nerved himself and braced himself to go right away from England and from the girl he had honoured with the truest love that ever strong man gave to woman—love so true and so tender."

For a minute she had to stop, and now the man whispered—

"Isn't this trying you too awfully?"

"Not if it serves my brother's turn," she answered, and then

went on. "Well, I lived on that letter, and George seemed to be speaking to me through it and to be saying, 'For my sake, do what I ask; don't let the sacrifice I would have made go for nothing: I loved Charles; love him for my sake till you learn to love him for his own.' And Charles was so gentle and so patient, so anxious that I should think of my own happiness only, that he won me in spite of myself at last. At any rate he so far won me in those days that I grew to feel that my path of duty lay in carrying out George's wishes and trying to make his friend happy. And that is where it was harder for a girl than for a man. Because I did what I thought was the kindest thing to do, not for my own sake, I knew that some people would misunderstand it. I could not show to any one, I did not even show to you, so near and dear to me in those days, what George had said to me, and so they called me cold-hearted, fickle, light-of-love, because I married one man two years after I had lost another, I who would so far rather have been what you to-day call cornerless. But I married Charles, and I have lived to be thankful. He seemed to warm a cold heart into life again, to soften what was hard, to bring out new sympathies, and to give me in my own life the interest of making him happy.

At this moment there came an interruption: a footman brought in tea, and in due course of time Ingram himself appeared. It was he who suggested a visit to the nursery after tea was over. The child, a bonny, curly-headed boy of three, had just been undressed by his nurse, and was warming his toes by the fire. His delight at the invasion was unbounded: the father and mother were expected visitors, but Uncle Tom, as they called him, the child's especial favourite, was a stranger to that part of the house, and so in a moment the child had clambered into his arms and insisted that Uncle Tom should carry him round the room to look at his pictures. There were several pretty autotypes, and more than one print; but the child's favourite picture of all, which hung by the side of his cot, so that his eyes rested upon it

when he first woke in the morning, was a coloured photograph of George Ronald, a present to his godson from the Bursar, who had had it enlarged from that which he always carried inside his watch.

Long and earnestly Tom gazed on the well-known features, and presently the child bent forward and kissed it.

"Georgy kisses his angel godfather every night and every morning," he whispered.

"Now I must be going back to my work," said Ingram. "Good night, mother's child," as he kissed the little fellow. "Daisy always acts as his chaplain and confessor."

This was said to Tom, who, putting down the child, had half turned to go when a look from Daisy stopped him.

"You may stay if you like," she said softly. Ingram smiled and nodded, and then beckoned to the nurse, who followed him out of the room, so that the child, the mother, and Tom were left alone together.

At a sign from his mother the boy knelt at her side and, folding his hands, repeated the few short prayers which she had taught him. Then rising from his knees he stood for a moment by his mother's side, and with his hands in her hands, but half looking at Tom as he spoke, he softly repeated, "Father's three earthly wishes—that I may grow up a comfort to my mother, a faithful servant of my country, a pure-hearted and unselfish man like George Ronald and Uncle Tom."

"There," said Daisy softly as a minute later the man and the woman left the nursery together, "will you ever feel again that there is no corner for you anywhere?"

And that sweet woman is still waiting and hoping that her brother Tom will some day bring to her a girl whom she may call by the loving name of sister. But men who know Tom best think otherwise. Only in May Mr Martin read aloud to me an extract from a letter which he had just received from the Bursar:—

"You will be glad to hear that we have Tom M'Gregor up

with us again. He is going to coach the Eight for the last week before the races. He is picking up the threads of his old life again, and looks better and happier than I have seen him look this year. But I think that he is doomed to be an old bachelor like ourselves. You know, perhaps, that he has taken some rooms in town up Bethnal Green way. I went and spent two days there with him in the Vac., and liked it. Old Martin, you and I have in our day fancied that we could teach these young fellows a thing or two. But I tell you that when I walked with that fellow in the slums of London, and saw women's eyes fill with tears and lads' faces flush with pleasure as he spoke to them, I, even I, bald-headed, blind old fool that I am, felt that I could gladly sit at the feet of this young Gamaliel and take lessons from him in the highest art of all, this art of making other people's happiness."

THE END.

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